

MARVEL



X-FACTOR[®]



SCAR TISSUE
DAVID • DE LANDRO • LUPACCHINO

YARDIN
Sonia

X-FACTOR



SCAR TISSUE



X-FACTOR

SCAR TISSUE

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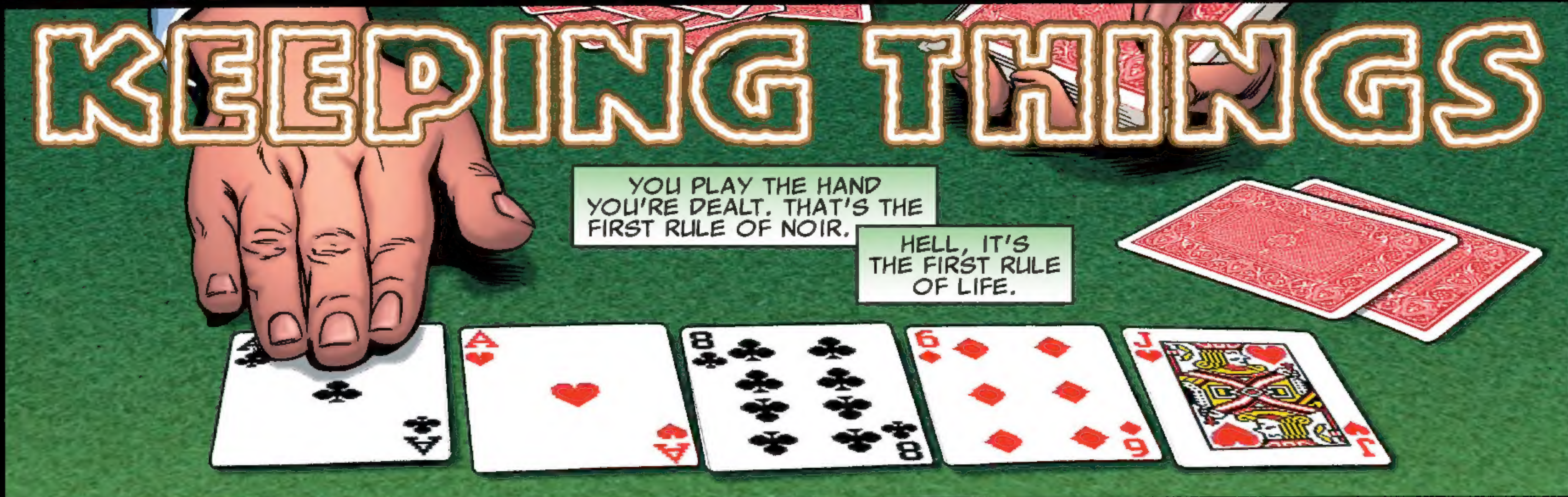
PREVIOUSLY:

OUR WHOLE UNIVERSE WAS IN A HOT DENSE STATE. THEN NEARLY FOURTEEN BILLION YEARS AGO EXPANSION STARTED. WAIT...TOO FAR BACK. LAST ISSUE (MUCH BETTER) X-FACTOR WENT HEAD-TO-HEAD WITH HELA, NORSE GODDESS OF THE UNDERWORLD, AND HER FORCES IN ORDER TO FREE THAT COSMIC TELEPORTING FUN-LOVER, PIP THE TROLL, FROM HER CLUTCHES. EVENTS CULMINATED IN A THROWDOWN BETWEEN HELA AND DARWIN IN WHICH HIS ASTOUNDING EVOLUTIONARY POWERS ENABLED HIM TO SURVIVE, BUT POSSIBLY AT GREAT PERSONAL COST. ALSO IN THE COURSE OF BATTLE, AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE ASGARDIAN WOLF-PRINCE HRIMHARI REVEALED TO SHATTERSTAR THAT HRIMHARI IS THE TRUE FATHER OF RAHNE'S CHILD. MEANWHILE, BACK IN NEW YORK, AN ODD VISIT TO THE DOCTOR HAS CAUSED RICTOR TO START TO FIGURE OUT FOR HIMSELF THAT RAHNE'S BABY MAY WELL BE MORE THAN IT APPEARS TO BE...



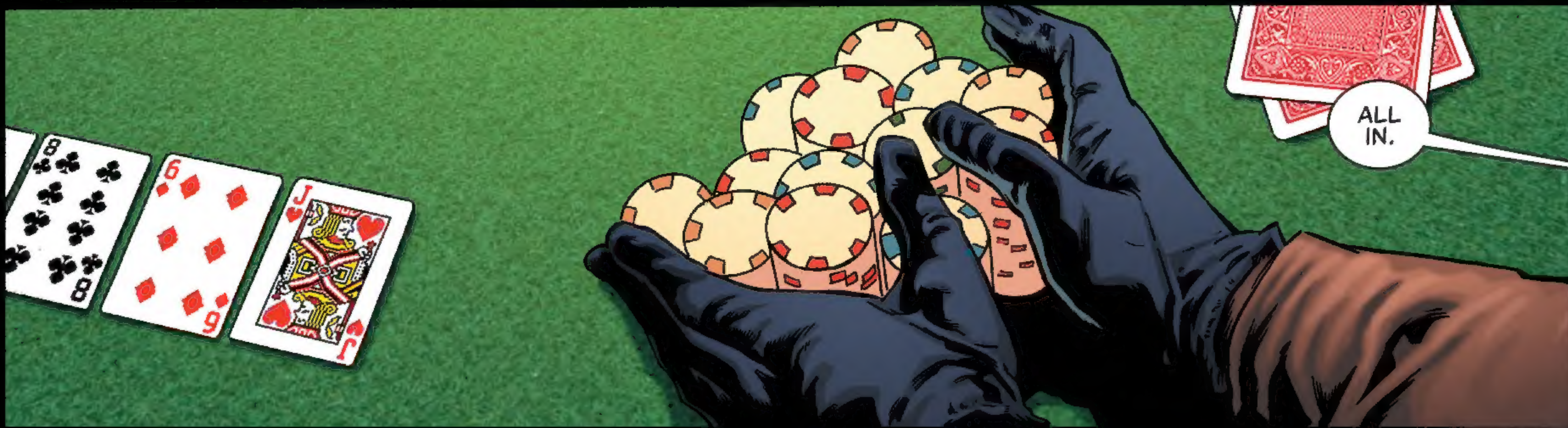


YARDIN
Sonia



YOU PLAY THE HAND
YOU'RE DEALT. THAT'S THE
FIRST RULE OF NOIR.

HELL, IT'S
THE FIRST RULE
OF LIFE.



ALL
IN.



REALLY.

YES.

THAT
WASN'T
BRIGHT.

WHATEVER.

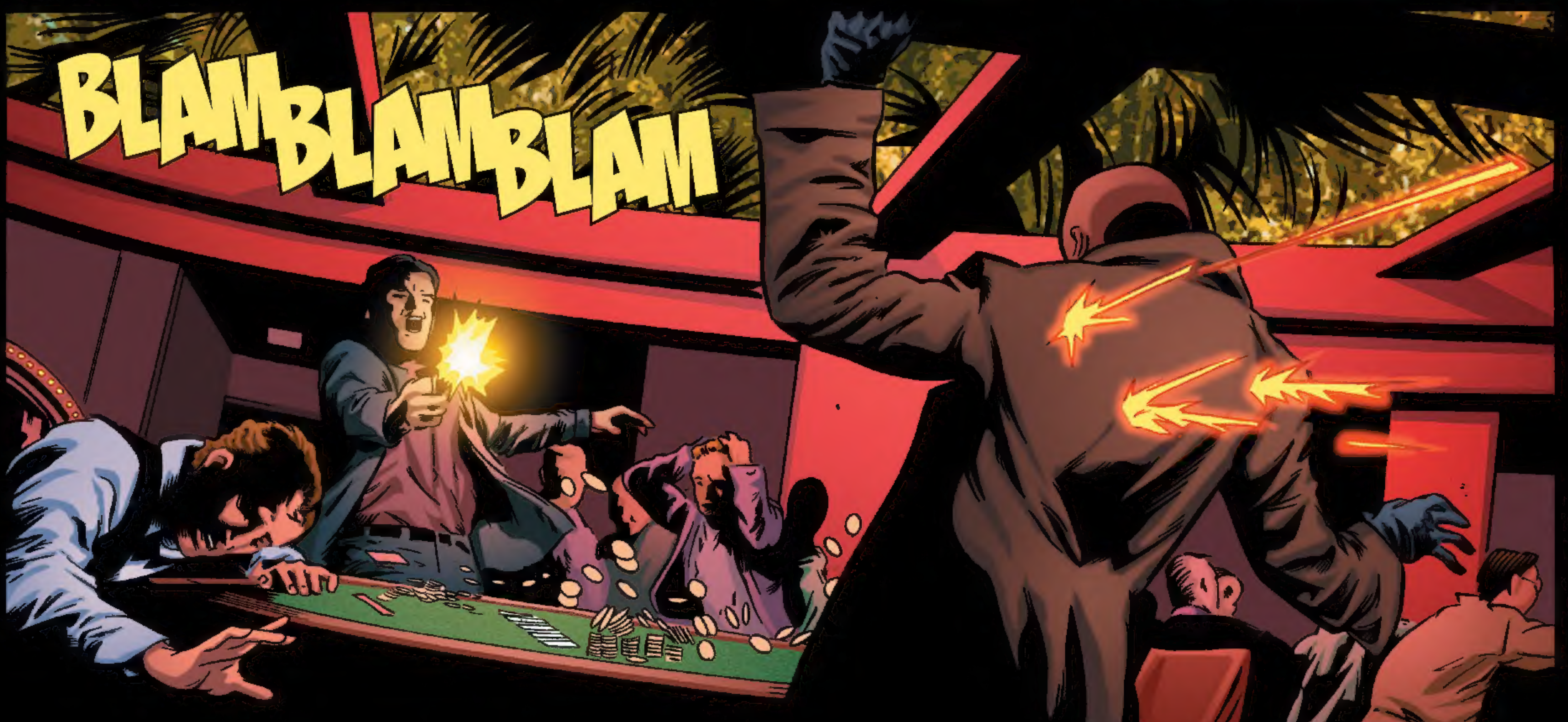


HIDING
BEHIND THE
SHADES.

AFRAID
IF I LOOK IN
YOUR EYES, I'LL
BE ABLE TO
TELL YOU'RE
BLUFFING?



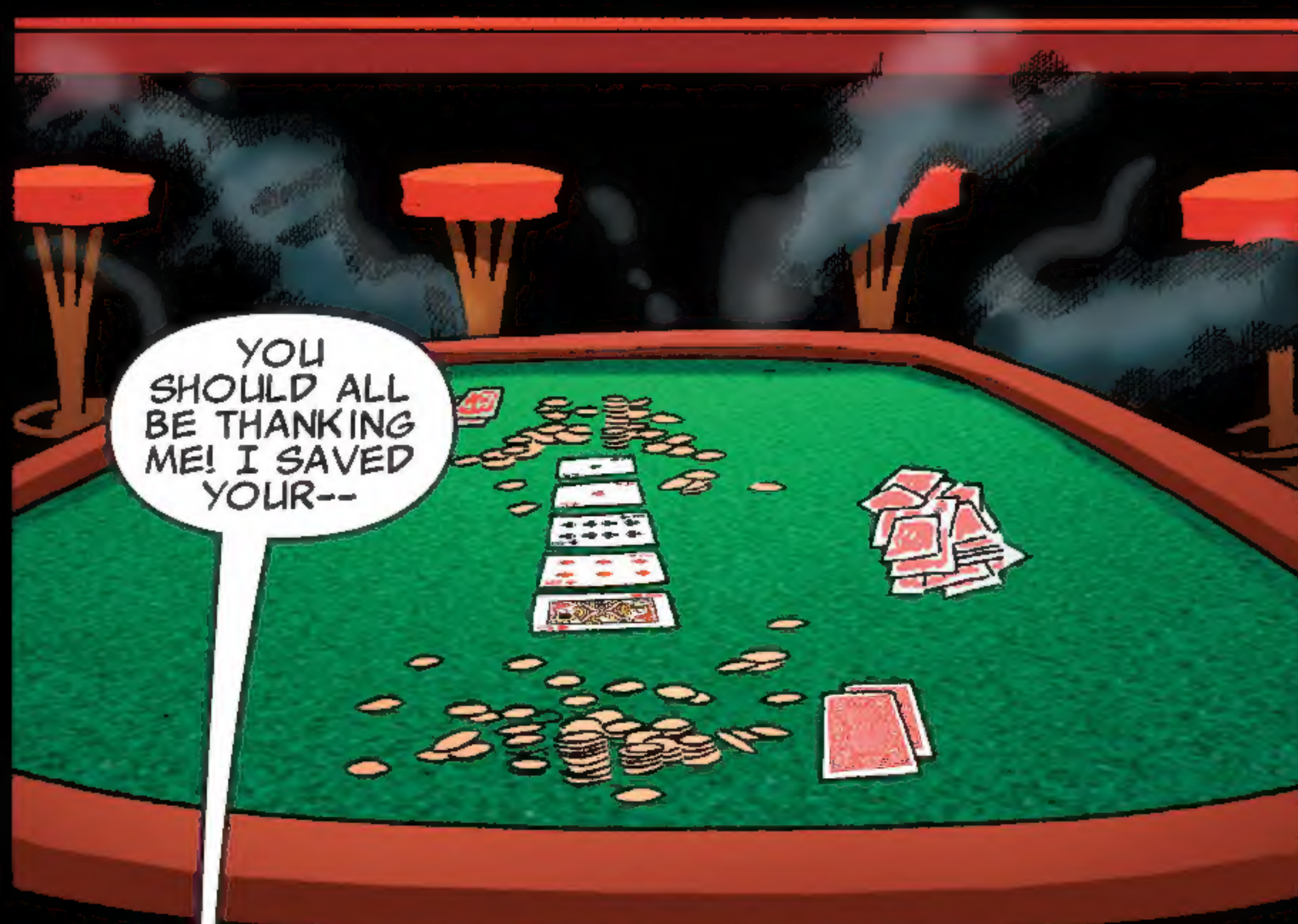
NOT
REALLY,
NO.





HE'S DEATH! YOU THINK I DON'T KNOW DEATH WHEN I SEE IT!

HOW COULD YOU NOT?!



YOU SHOULD ALL BE THANKING ME! I SAVED YOUR--



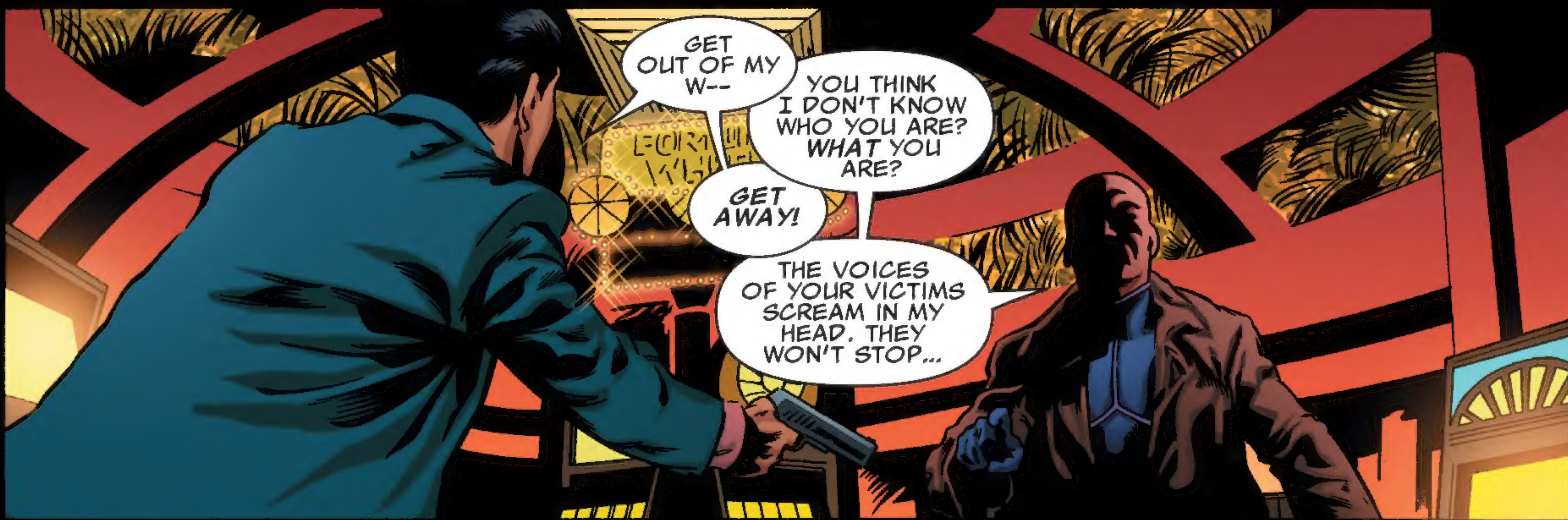
CALLING ME OR NOT?



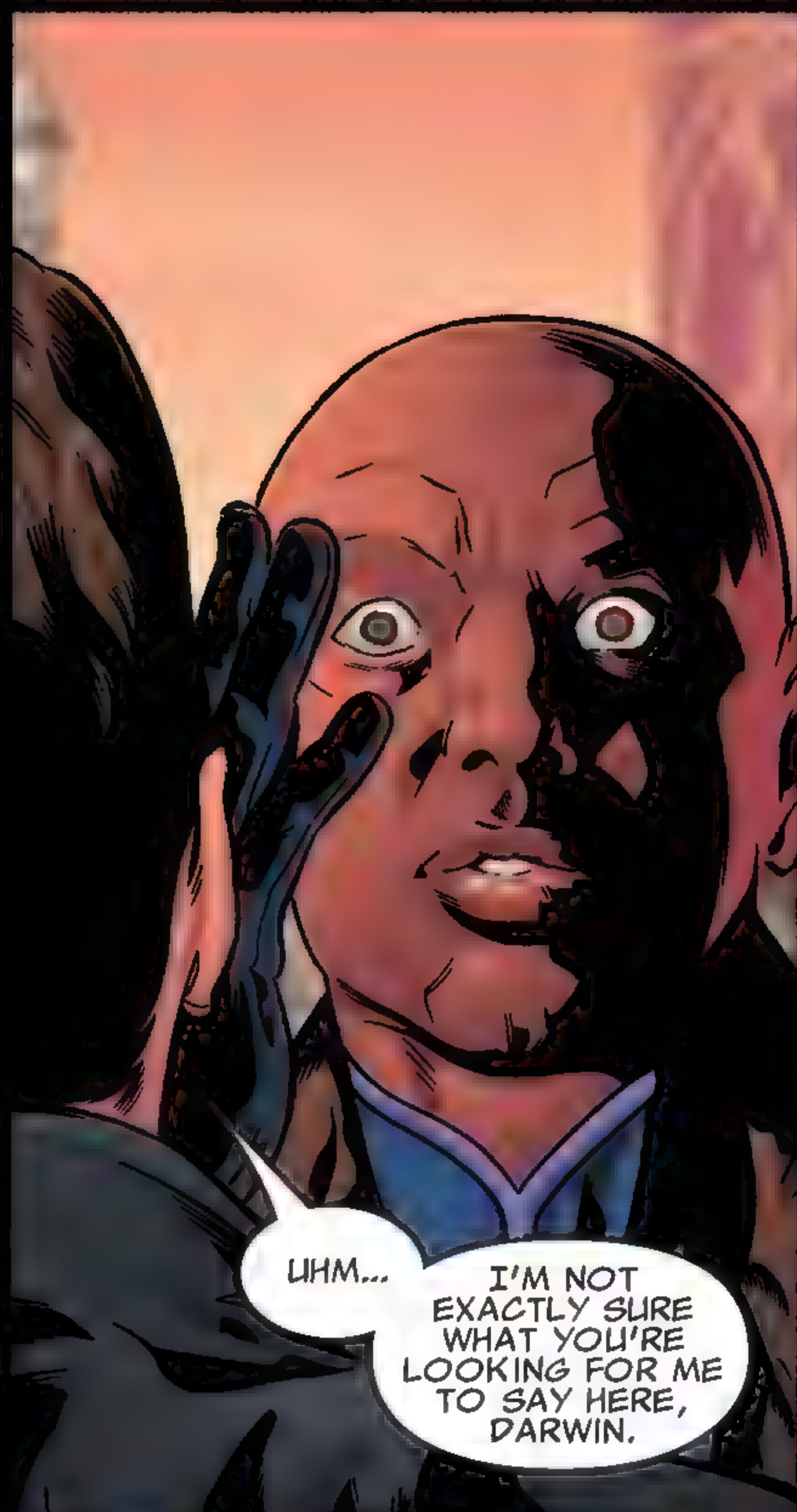
EEEEYAHHHH!!!



I GUESS IT'S NOT.







UHM...

I'M NOT EXACTLY SURE WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR ME TO SAY HERE, DARWIN.



IT WAS YOUR PLAN, TO HAVE ME SQUARE OFF AGAINST HELA! AGAINST A DEATH GODDESS, FOR CRYING OUT LOUD!

"PLAN" MIGHT NOT BE THE RIGHT WORD. I CAME UP WITH IT ON THE FLY WHILE WE WERE, Y'KNOW, FIGHTING FOR OUR LIVES.



BUT I FIGURED, HEY, WHATEVER EFFECTS THAT MIGHT HAVE WOULD BE TEMPORARY!

YOU'D EVOLVE AND THEN SHAKE IT OFF! LIKE ALWAYS!



YEAH, WELL...

YOU FIGURED WRONG.

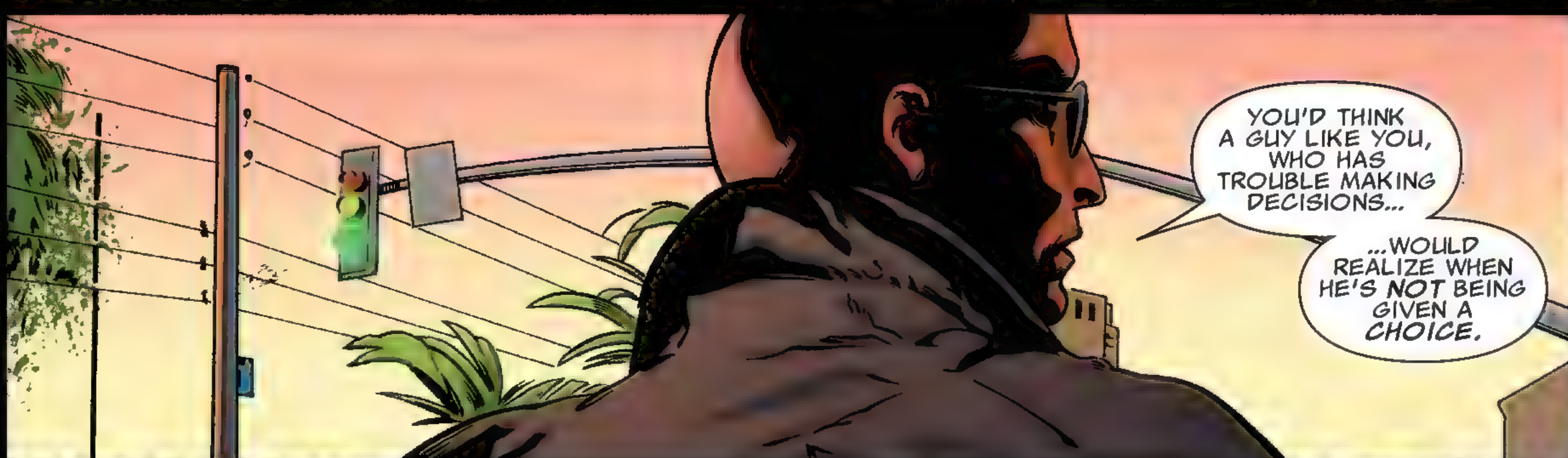
'CAUSE IN REAL LIFE, EVOLUTION IS A ONE-WAY STREET, AND SOME THINGS YOU DON'T SHAKE OFF.



OR SOMETIMES IT JUST TAKES LONGER.

MAYBE, BUT UNTIL I KNOW, I NEED SOME TIME TO MYSELF.

WE CAN'T JUST LEAVE YOU HERE! WE'RE YOUR FRIENDS! WE CAN HELP--



YOU'D THINK A GUY LIKE YOU, WHO HAS TROUBLE MAKING DECISIONS...

...WOULD REALIZE WHEN HE'S NOT BEING GIVEN A CHOICE.



I'M NOT MAD AT YOU, JAMIE. YOU MADE THE CALL, I EXECUTED IT, AND THAT'S THE WAY THAT GOES.

BUT, TRUST ME, YOU **DON'T** WANT TO BE AROUND ME RIGHT NOW.



HELL, I DON'T WANT TO BE AROUND ME. BUT I GOT NO OTHER OPTIONS.

YOU DO.

C'MON, DARWIN. WE'RE YOUR FRIENDS--



FRIENDS RESPECT OTHER FRIENDS' WISHES.

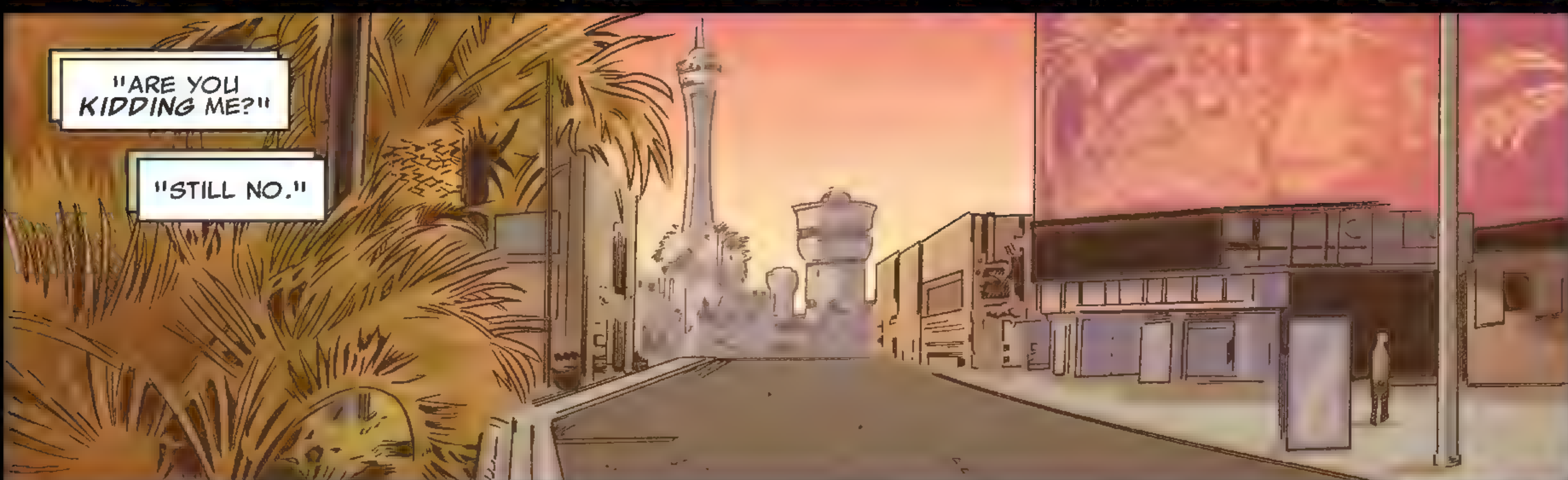
DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME. I'LL SURVIVE.

IT'S WHAT I DO.



"YOU LET HIM GO? MADROX, ARE YOU KIDDING ME?"

"NO."



"ARE YOU KIDDING ME?"

"STILL NO."





ANYBODY ELSE WANT TO CHIME IN? REMIND ME WHAT A SUCKY JOB I'M DOING, BEING IN CHARGE?!

YOU THINK I DON'T KNOW THIS IS MY FAULT?

THAT I BROUGHT US OUT HERE? THAT MY CALL SCREWED THAT KID UP?

IN FACT...WHY STOP THERE? DUMP IT ALL ON ME! I DESERVE IT!

I WAS ON THE GRASSY KNOLL! I FRAMED ROGER RABBIT! I SHOT THE SHERIFF!

BRING IT ON! BRING IT--

Y'KNOW, YOU ARE MORE IN NEED OF A BEER THAN ANY GUY ON THE PLANET.

SHOVE THIS IN YOUR PIE-HOLE, WILL YA?



PIP?

AWWW. YOU REMEMBERED.

DIDN'T YOU DISAPPEAR RIGHT AFTER WE GOT YOU OUT OF HELA'S CLUTCHES?

YOU'RE THE SMART ONE, HUH, BLONDIE. I CAN TELL.



WHERE'D'JA GET THE SUIT?

I MUGGED PETER DINKLAGE. LOOKS GOOD, HUH?

IT... ACTUALLY DOES.



I...REALLY
THOUGHT WE'D
SEEN THE LAST
OF YOU.



WHAT, YA THINK I'M
THAT MUCH OF AN
INGRATE, THAT I'D
JUST TAKE OFF?

IS THAT
WHAT'TCHA ALL
THINK O' ME?



WELL...
YEAH.

MORE
OR LESS.

PRETTY
MUCH.

I'M
RESERVING
JUDGMENT.



I'M HURT.
I'M TRULY
HURT.



FACT OF THE MATTER IS,
I WUZ ROYALTY ONCE. I
STILL GOT SOME, WHATTAYA
CALL IT, HONOR.

LIKE IT OR
NOT, I OWE YOU
GUYS. YA GOT ME
OUTTA A JAM WITH
TALL, GREEN AND
DAMNED, AND I
GOTTA SETTLE
THAT SCORE.

REALLY.

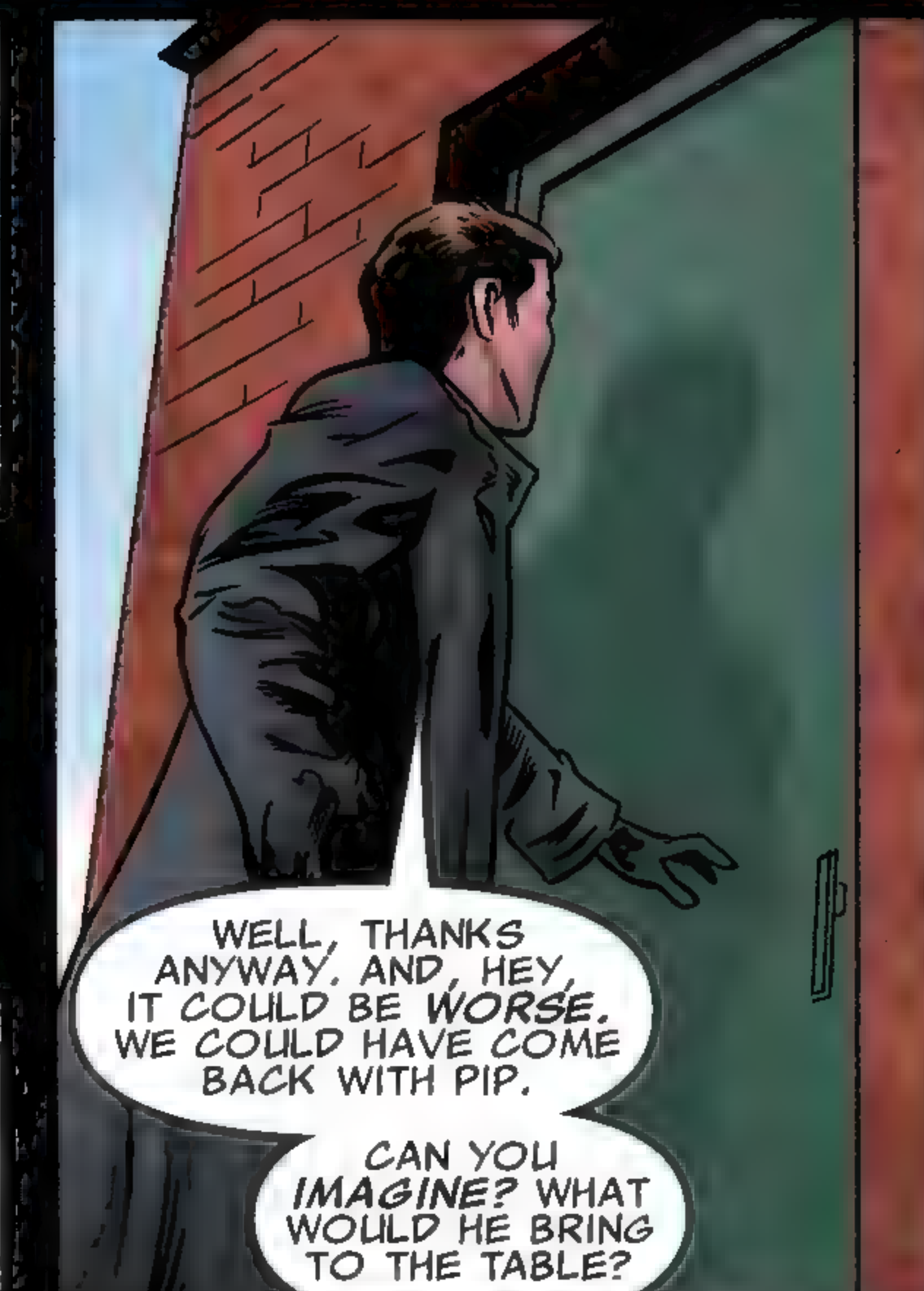
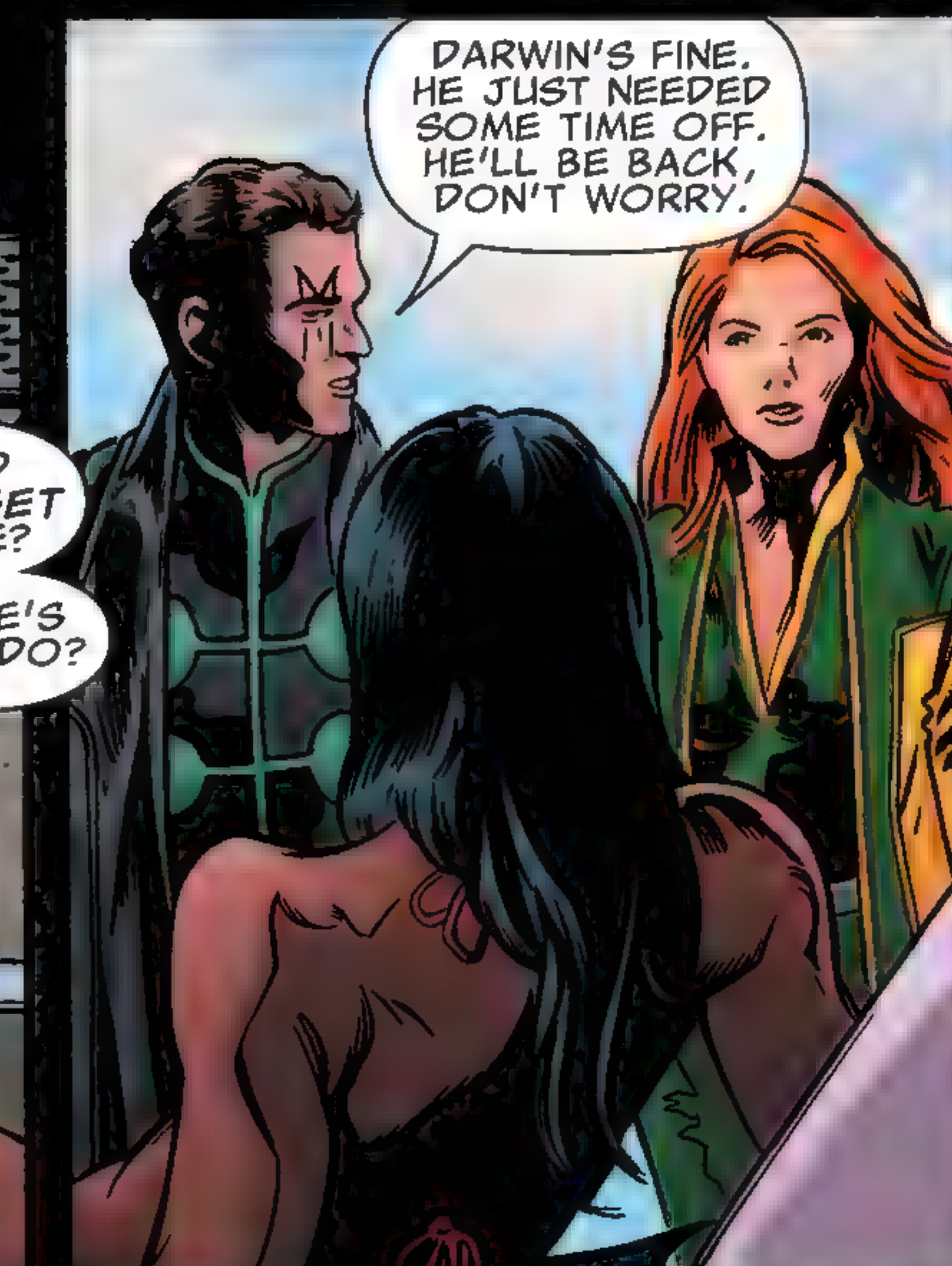


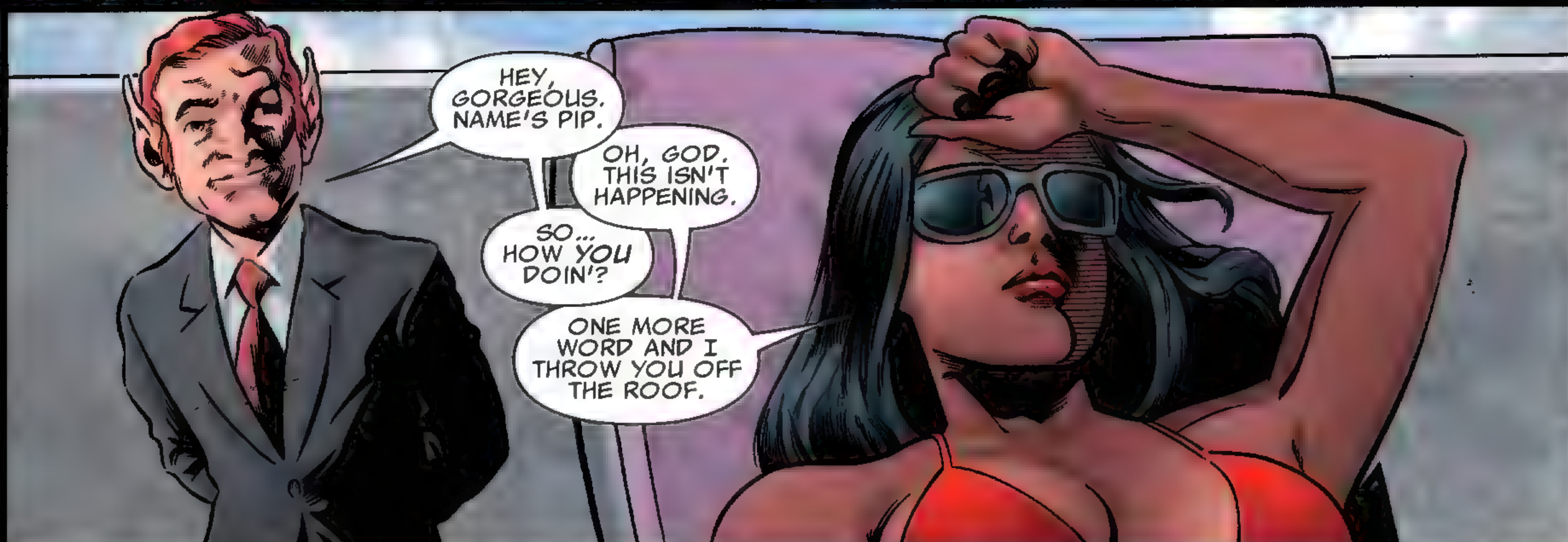
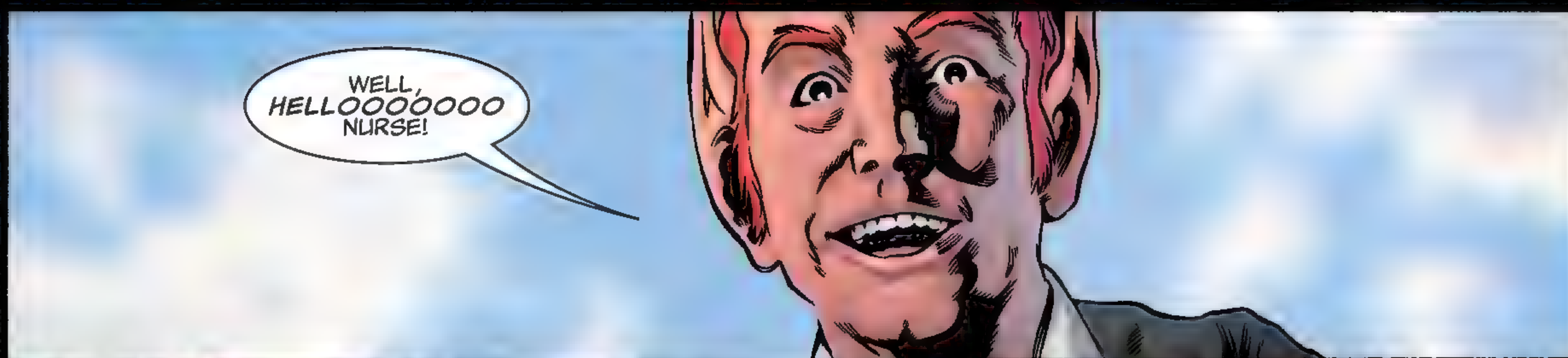
UH-HUH.

TELL YOU
WHAT: STEP OUT
INTO THE HALLWAY, AND
I'LL CONFER WITH MY
ASSOCIATES. OKAY?

SURE
THING.









RICTOR!
WE NEED TO
TALK!

ARE YOU
HERE?



IF I
WEREN'T HERE,
HOW WOULD I
RESPOND?



RICTOR?

WHOA. HOW
MUCH HAVE YOU
HAD TO DRINK?

NOT
ENOUGH,
I CAN TELL
YOU THAT.

WHAT
THE HELL
HAPPENED?



THE DOCTOR...
SHE SAID THE BABY'S
ALL "MYSTICAL."

DO I LOOK
MYSTICAL TO
YOU?

YOU
LOOK WASTED
TO ME.

GOOD
CALL.



GOOD LORD,
DID A DISTILLÉRY
BLOW UP?

JUST MY
BREATHING THE
AIR IN HERE MIGHT
COUNT AS
FALLING OFF THE
WAGON.



WHERE'S RAHNE?

DUNNO. SHE CLAMMED UP AT THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE. WOULDN'T TALK.

WE WENT OUT, I FLAGGED A CAB, TURNED AROUND, SHE WAS GONE.



RICTOR... YOU'RE OFF THE HOOK.

OH?

YOU'RE NOT THE FATHER OF HER BABY.

I WAS KIND OF FIGURIN' THAT.



YEAH. IT'S SOME GUY NAMED HUMMINAH HUMMINAH.

I THOUGHT IT WAS HAIRY HARRY.

IT'S HRIMHARI, YOU BOZOS.



WASN'T HE, LIKE...A WOLF GOD OR SOMETHING?

RIGHT, SO DON'T FEEL BAD. SHE DUMPED YOU FOR A GOD. GODS ARE PRETTY BRUTAL COMPETITION.

I BET SHATTERSTAR WOULD DUMP YOU FOR A GOD. THE WAY HE WAS LOOKING AT THOR...



WHAT? DID I SAY SOMETHING WRONG?

PICK ANYTHING.



LOOK, BOTTOM LINE IS...TO HELL WITH HER. SHE LIED TO ME.

NO. SHE DIDN'T.



YOU HEARD
WHAT YOU
WANTED TO
HEAR.

OR MAYBE
WHAT SHE
THOUGHT YOU
NEEDED TO
HEAR.

C'MON,
LAYLA. WHAT'S
THAT SUPPOSED
TO MEAN?



IT MEANS
YOU CAN'T
LEAVE IT
LIKE THIS.

ISN'T
THAT RIGHT,
SHATTERSTAR?



YES.
YES, IT
IS.

ARE YOU
SERIOUS?

WHATEVER
ELSE RAHNE IS...
SHE'S SCARED.
AND SHE CHOSE TO
COME TO US AS A
SAFE HAVEN. WE
HAVE TO HONOR
THAT, EVEN IF WE
DON'T LIKE HER
METHODS.



BUT...HOW
WOULD I
EVEN FIND
HER?

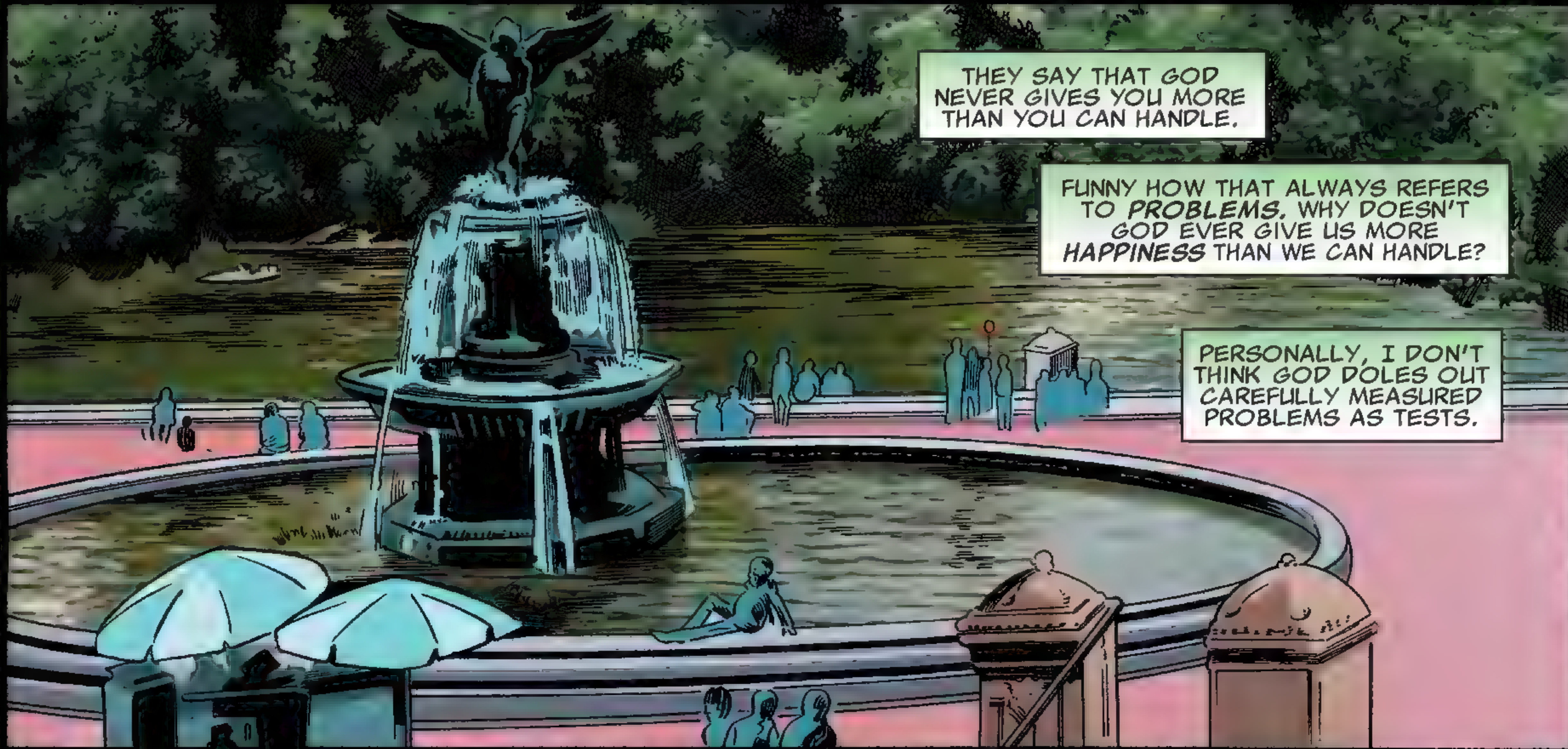


AAAAAHHHH



THUDD

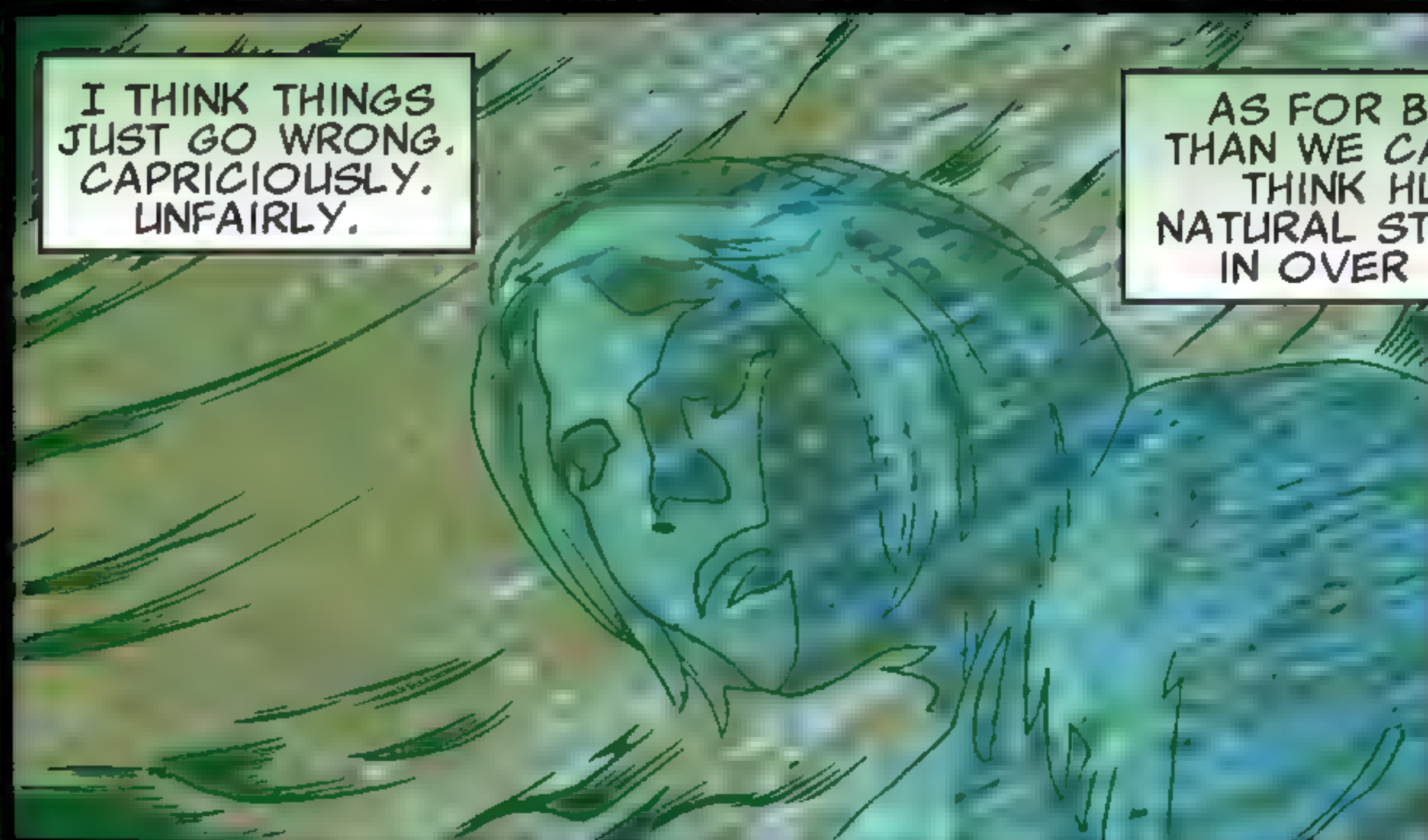
WE GOT IT
COVERED.



THEY SAY THAT GOD NEVER GIVES YOU MORE THAN YOU CAN HANDLE.

FUNNY HOW THAT ALWAYS REFERS TO PROBLEMS. WHY DOESN'T GOD EVER GIVE US MORE HAPPINESS THAN WE CAN HANDLE?

PERSONALLY, I DON'T THINK GOD DOLES OUT CAREFULLY MEASURED PROBLEMS AS TESTS.



I THINK THINGS JUST GO WRONG. CAPRICIOUSLY. UNFAIRLY.

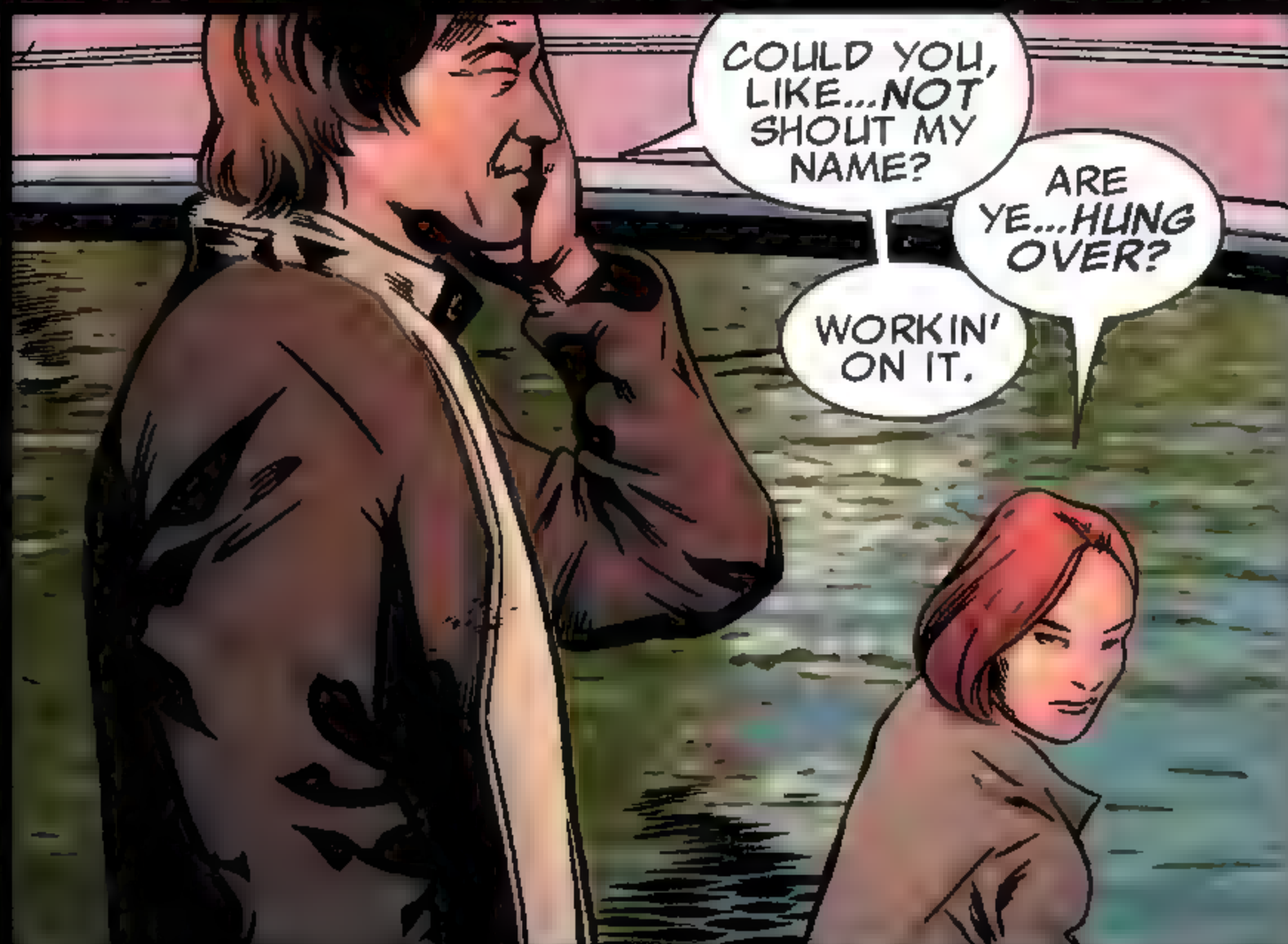


AS FOR BEING MORE THAN WE CAN HANDLE...I THINK HUMANITY'S NATURAL STATE IS TO BE IN OVER OUR HEAD.

AND HOW WE REACT IS THE MEASURE OF WHO WE ARE.



RICTOR!



COULD YOU, LIKE...NOT SHOUT MY NAME?

ARE YE...HUNG OVER?

WORKIN' ON IT.



HOW DID YE FIND ME?

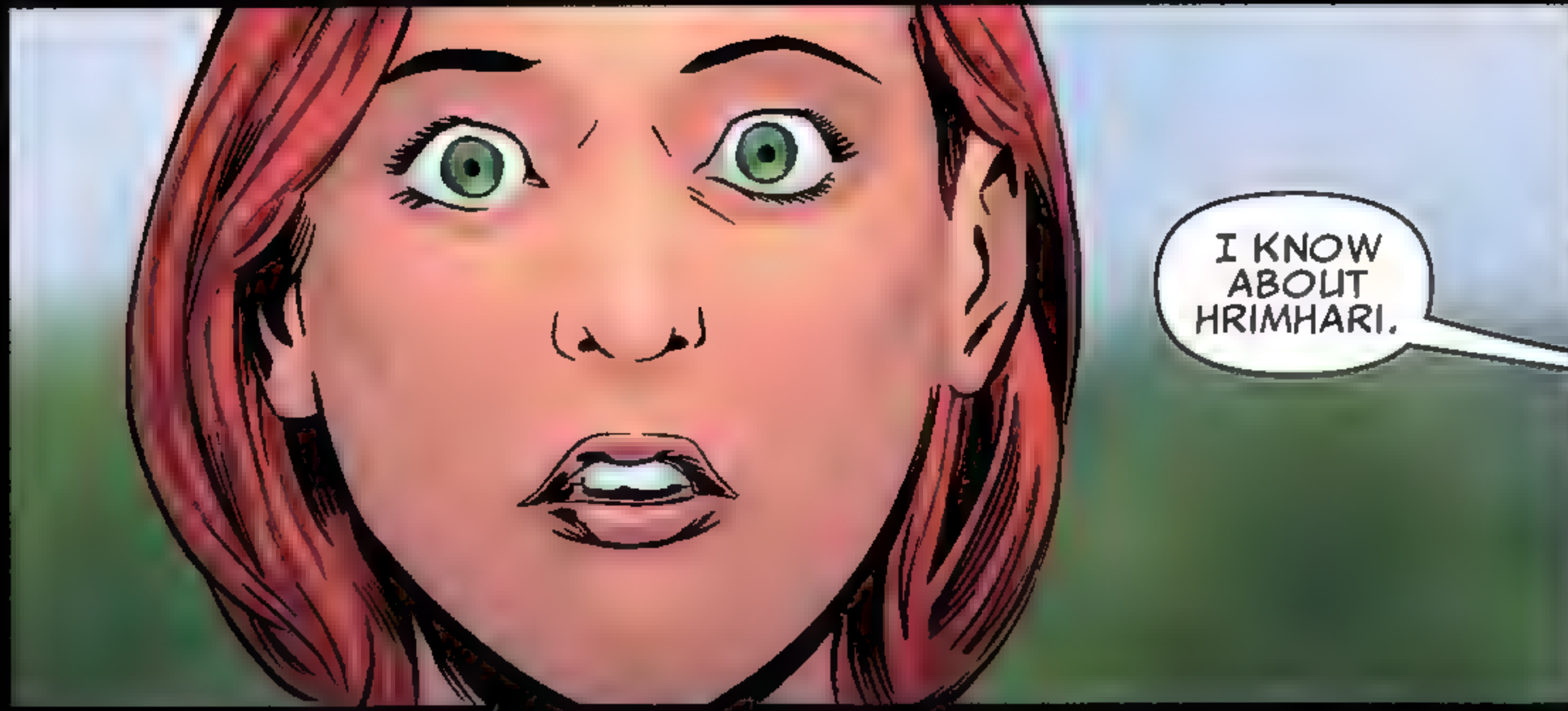
THROUGH A TROLL.

SOME IDIOT ON THE INTERNET...?

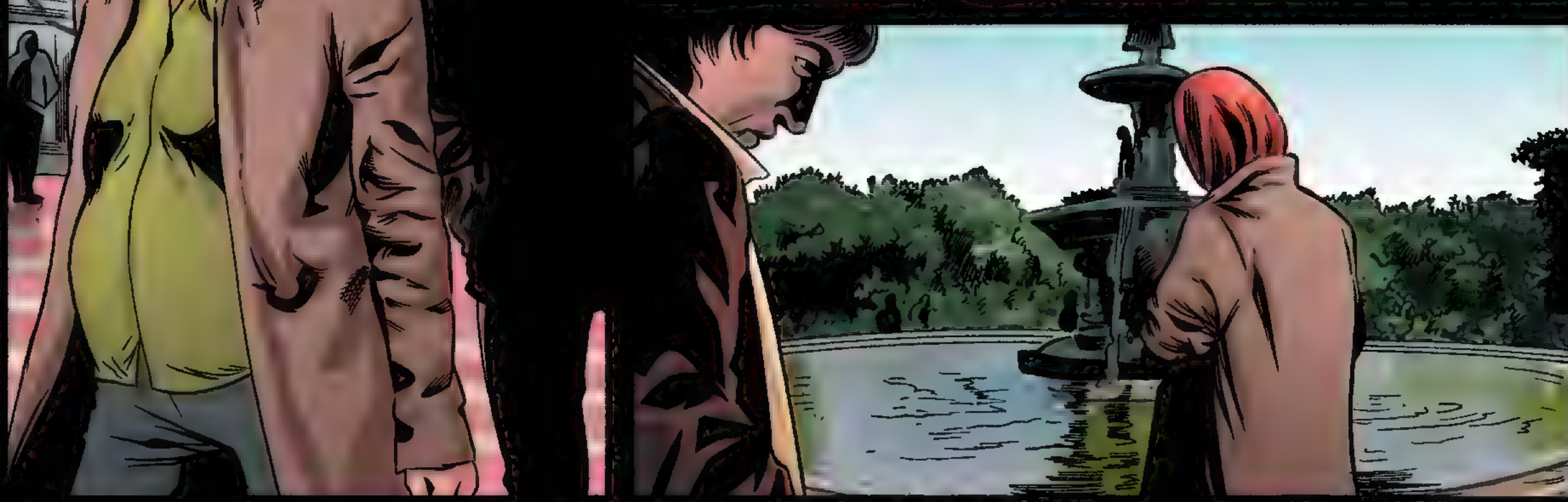
NOT THAT KIND OF... NEVERMIND.



LOOK, RICTOR,
AH MADE A MISTAKE
COMIN' BACK, ALL
RIGHT? AH ADMIT IT.
SO JUST FERGIT
THAT I EVER--



I KNOW
ABOUT
HRIMHARI.



YE MUST
THINK AH'M
A TERRIBLE
PERSON.

I DUNNO
WHAT I THINK
RIGHT NOW.

I MEAN...
WERE YOU WITH
HIM...AT THE SAME
TIME THAT WE
WERE--?



NO. LONG
AFTER.

BUT HE'S
PART WOLF, AND
AH'M PART WOLF,
AND A WOLF'S
GESTATION PERIOD
IS ABOUT TWO
MONTHS, NOT
NINE, SO...



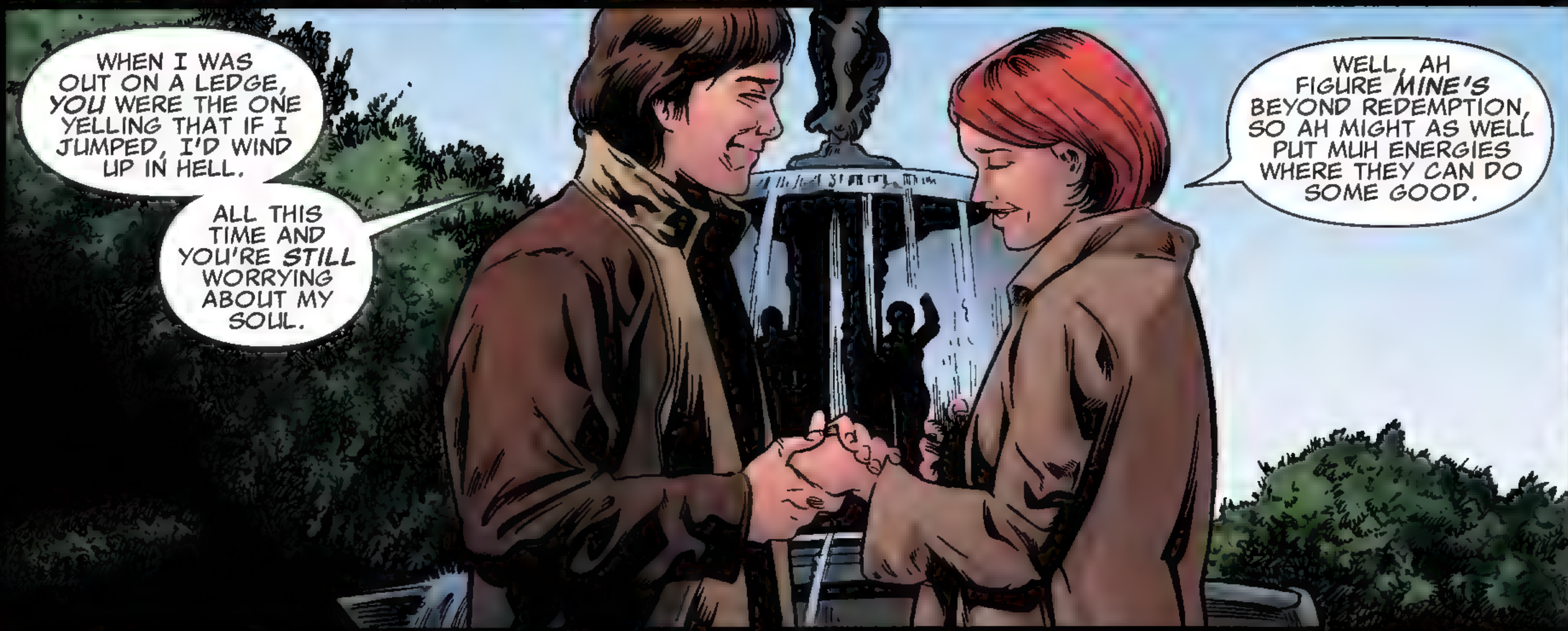
...SO THIS IS
HAPPENING A LOT
FASTER THAN A
NORMAL HUMAN
PREGNANCY.

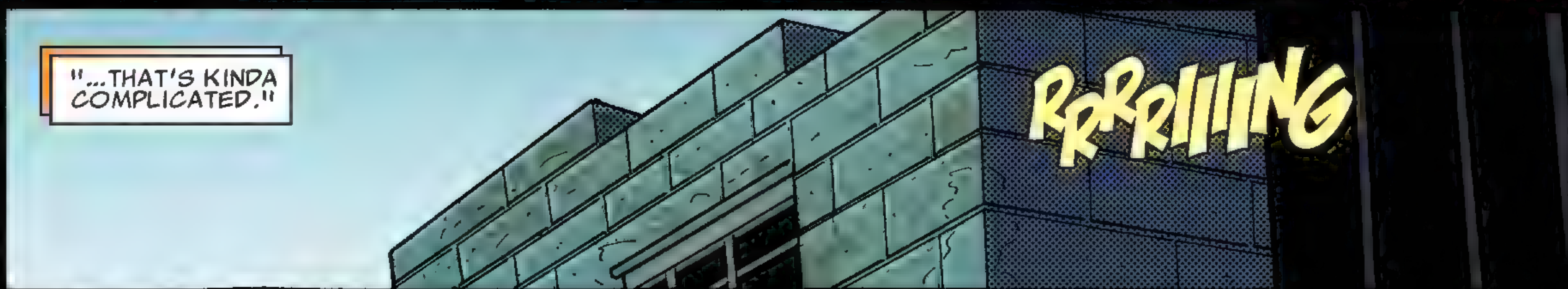
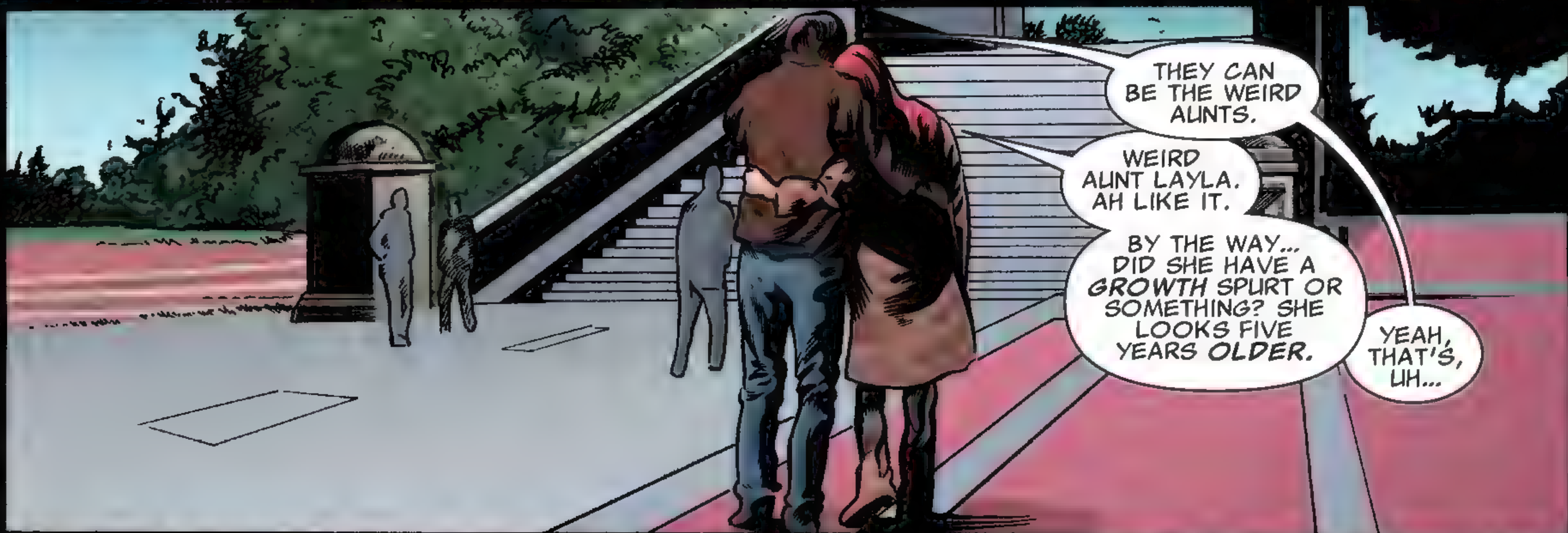
AND YOU
DECIDED TO
MAKE ME THINK
I WAS THE--?

JUST A
TOUCH,
AYE.

NO. AH
SWEAR, AH
NEVER PLANNED
THAT. IT'S
JUST...

JUST
WHAT?





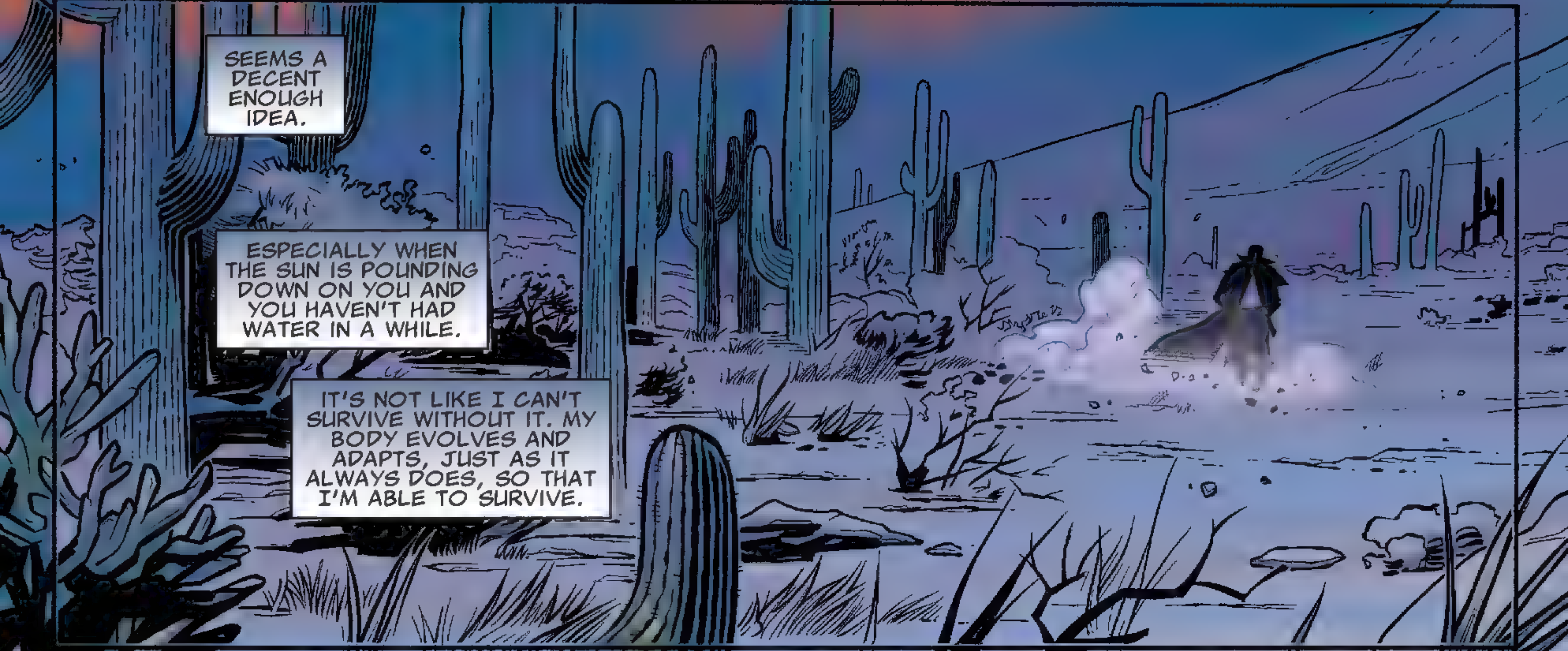




MADROX TOLD ME HE
LIKES TO TALK TO HIMSELF
SOMETIMES. NOT
OUT LOUD. INWARDLY.

KEEP A KIND OF
NARRATIVE GOING
THROUGH HIS HEAD.

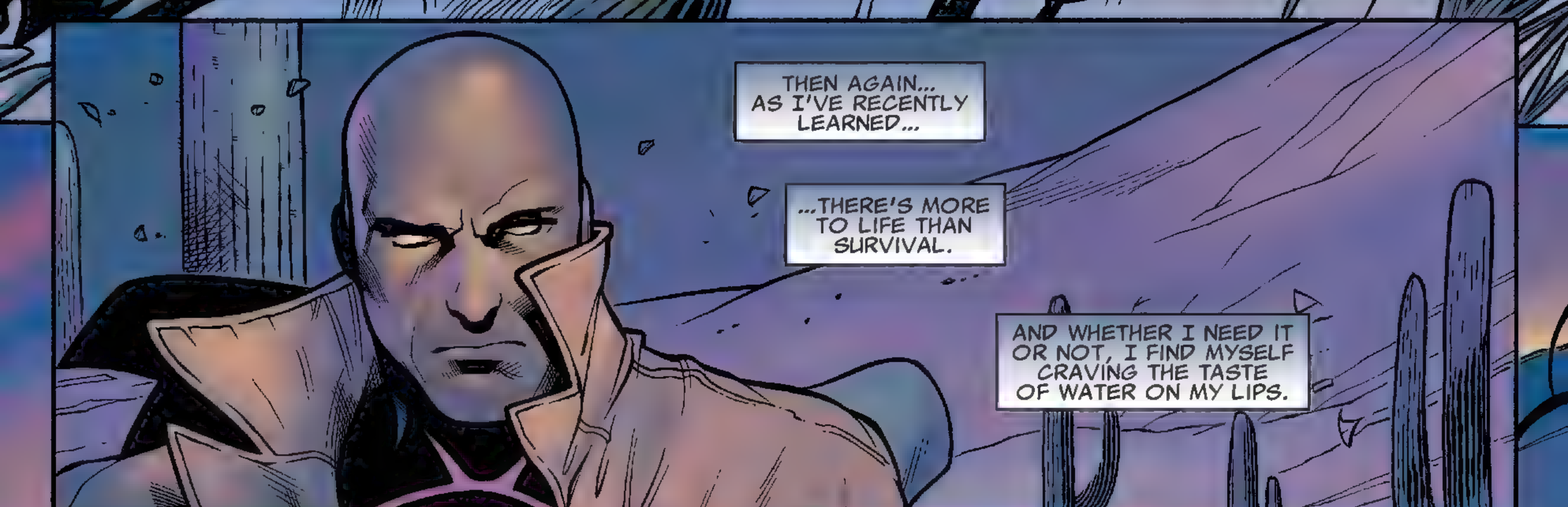
HELPS KEEP
HIM FOCUSED,
HE SAID.



SEEMS A
DECENT
ENOUGH
IDEA.

ESPECIALLY WHEN
THE SUN IS POUNDING
DOWN ON YOU AND
YOU HAVEN'T HAD
WATER IN A WHILE.

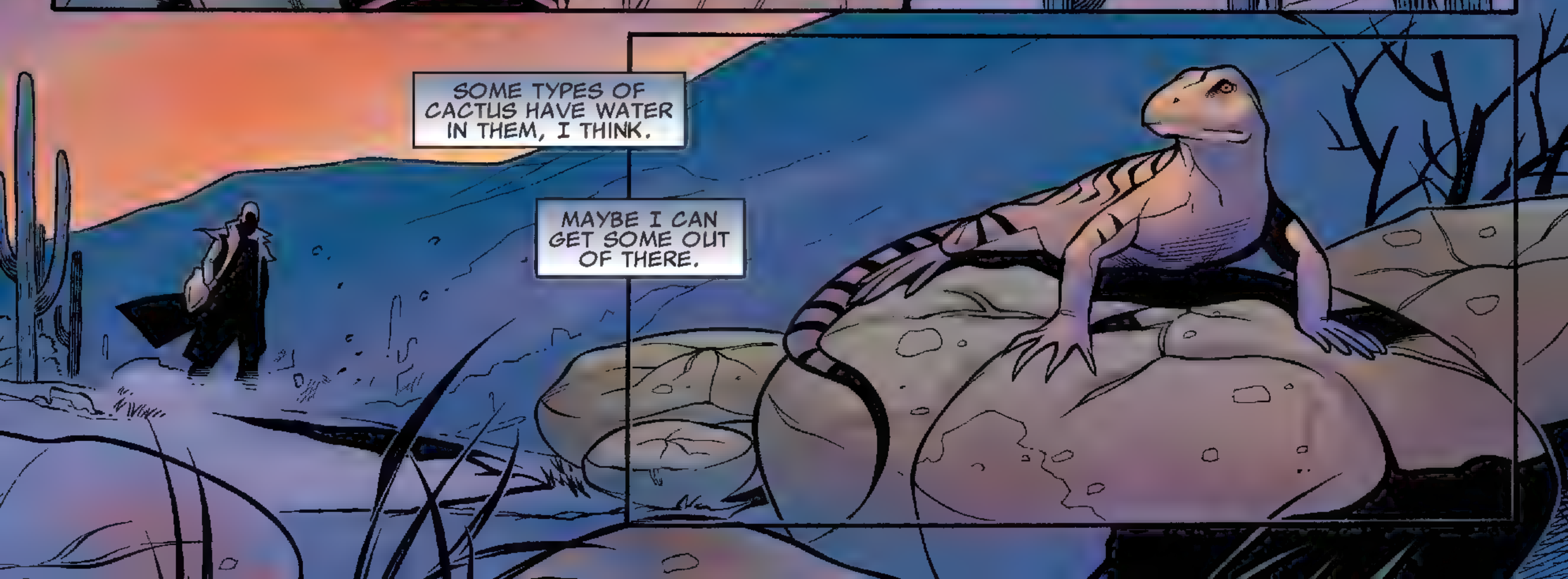
IT'S NOT LIKE I CAN'T
SURVIVE WITHOUT IT. MY
BODY EVOLVES AND
ADAPTS, JUST AS IT
ALWAYS DOES, SO THAT
I'M ABLE TO SURVIVE.



THEN AGAIN...
AS I'VE RECENTLY
LEARNED...

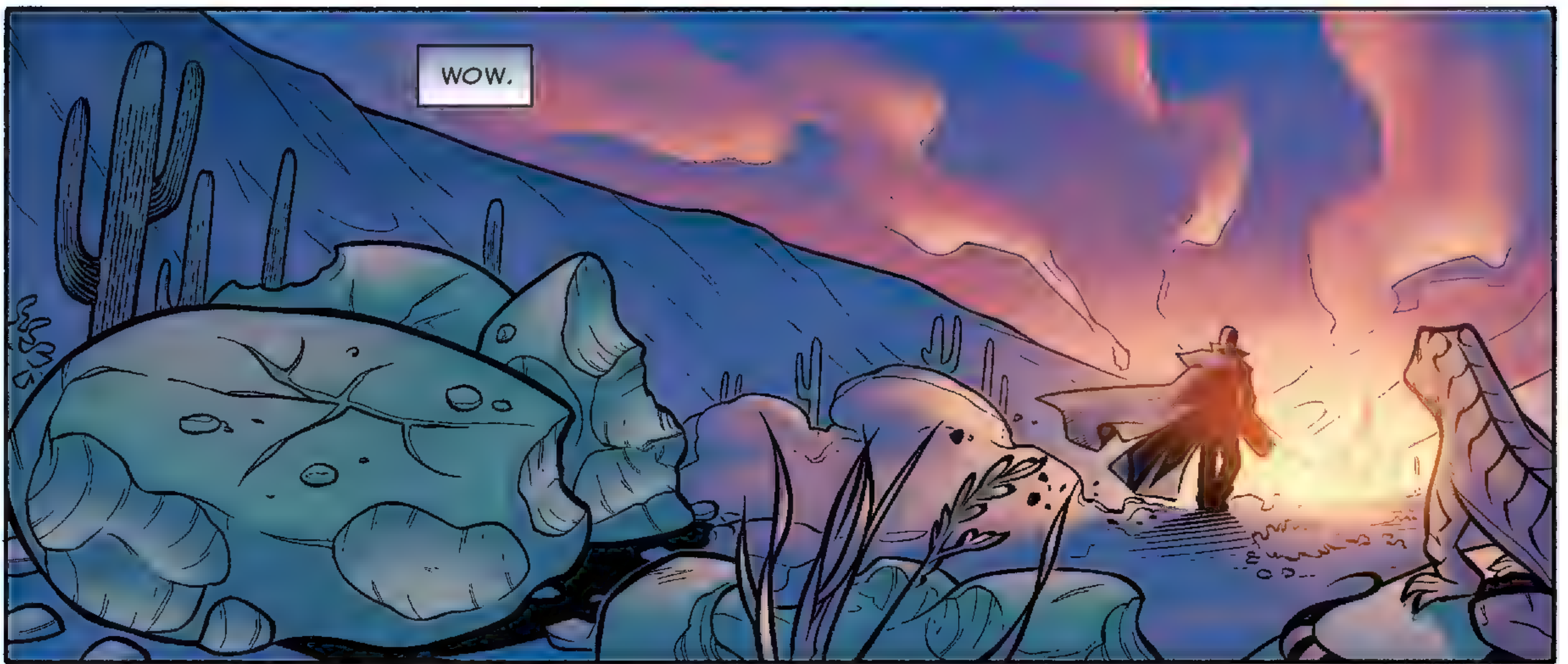
...THERE'S MORE
TO LIFE THAN
SURVIVAL.

AND WHETHER I NEED IT
OR NOT, I FIND MYSELF
CRAVING THE TASTE
OF WATER ON MY LIPS.

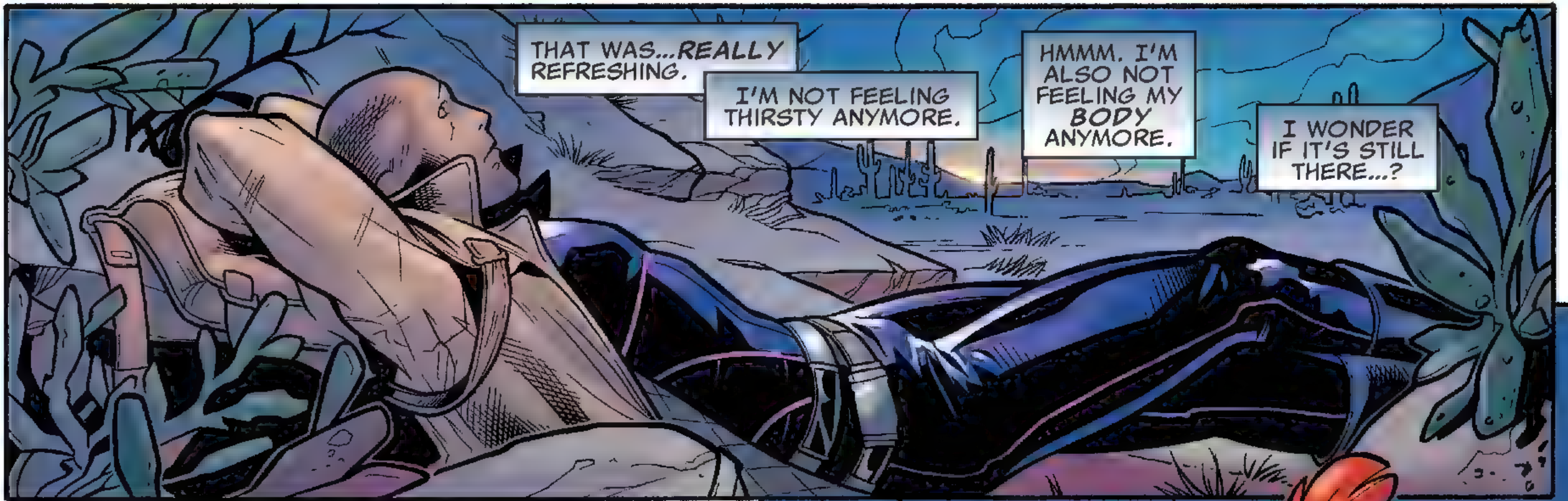


SOME TYPES OF
CACTUS HAVE WATER
IN THEM, I THINK.

MAYBE I CAN
GET SOME OUT
OF THERE.



WOW.

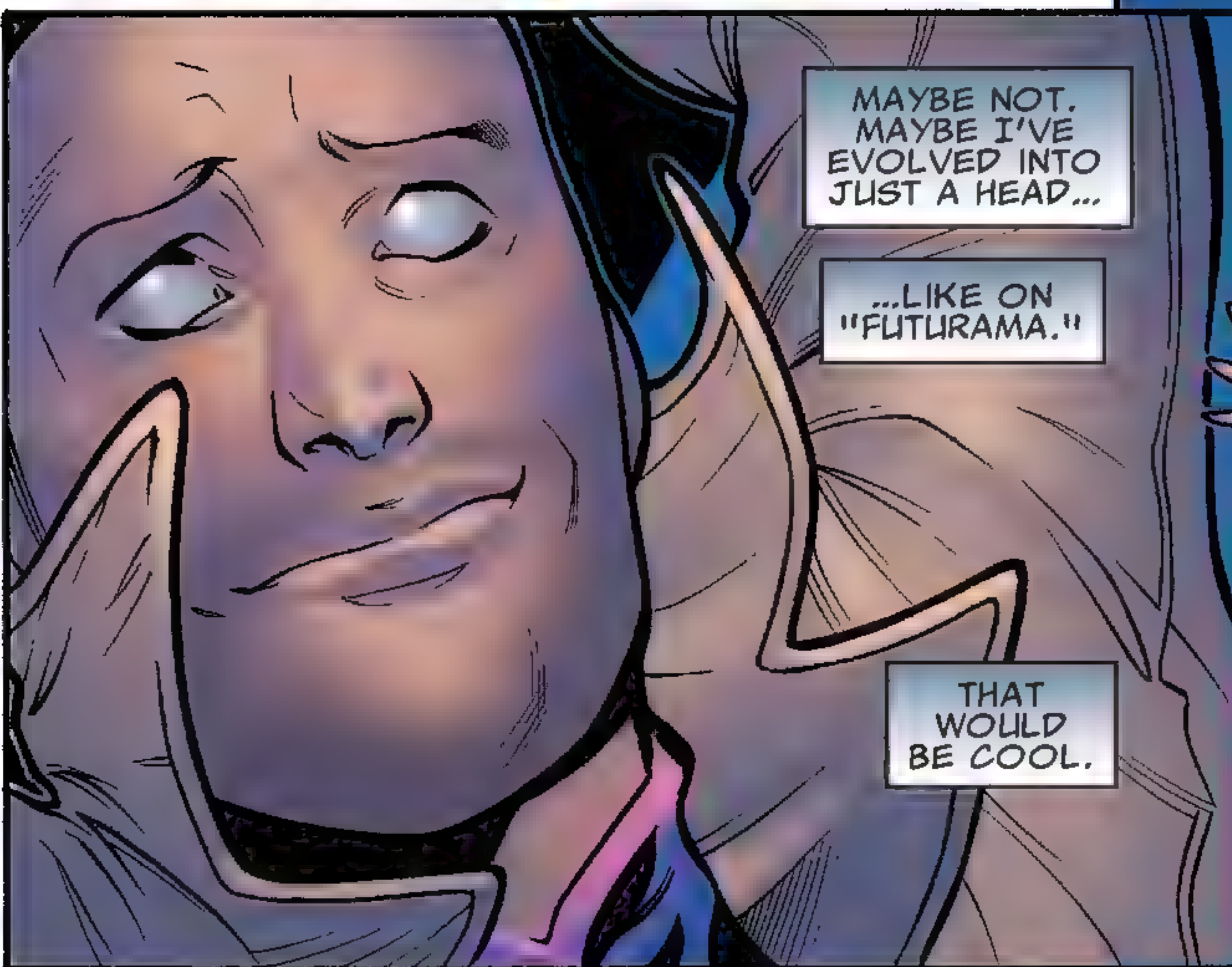


THAT WAS...REALLY REFRESHING.

I'M NOT FEELING THIRSTY ANYMORE.

HMMM. I'M ALSO NOT FEELING MY BODY ANYMORE.

I WONDER IF IT'S STILL THERE...?



MAYBE NOT. MAYBE I'VE EVOLVED INTO JUST A HEAD...

...LIKE ON "FUTURAMA."

THAT WOULD BE COOL.



Help me...



...please... help me...don't let it get me...

I HAVE NO IDEA
WHERE SHE
CAME FROM...

...OR WHY SHE'S
DRESSED LIKE A
REFUGEE FROM
"UNFORGIVEN."

BUT I SAY THE
THING YOU'RE
SUPPOSED TO
SAY AT TIMES
LIKE THIS...

DON'T
WORRY. I'LL
PROTECT
YOU--

THEN I
HEAR A
ROAR...

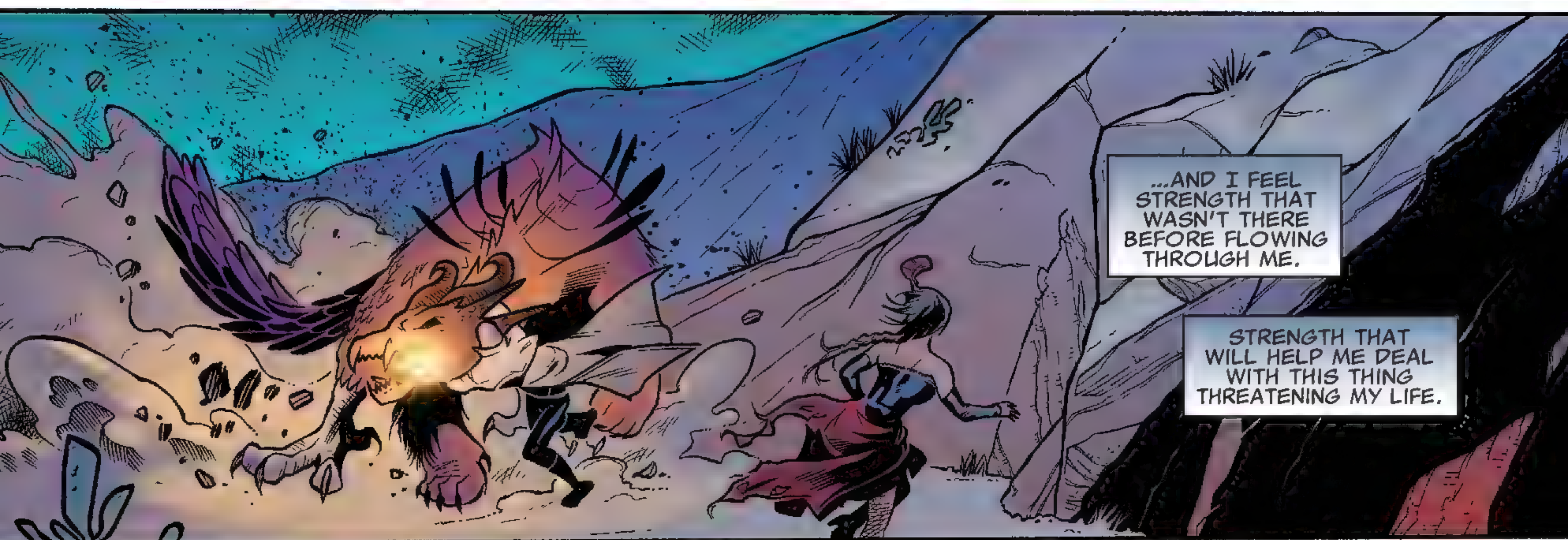
...AND IF FOUL BREATH
WERE A THREAT TO LIFE,
THEN MY NOSE WOULD
EVOLVE TO CLOSE
OFF MY NOSTRILS.

I'D WONDER WHAT
THE HELL IT WAS, BUT
HELL SEEMS TO BE
WHAT SPAT IT OUT.



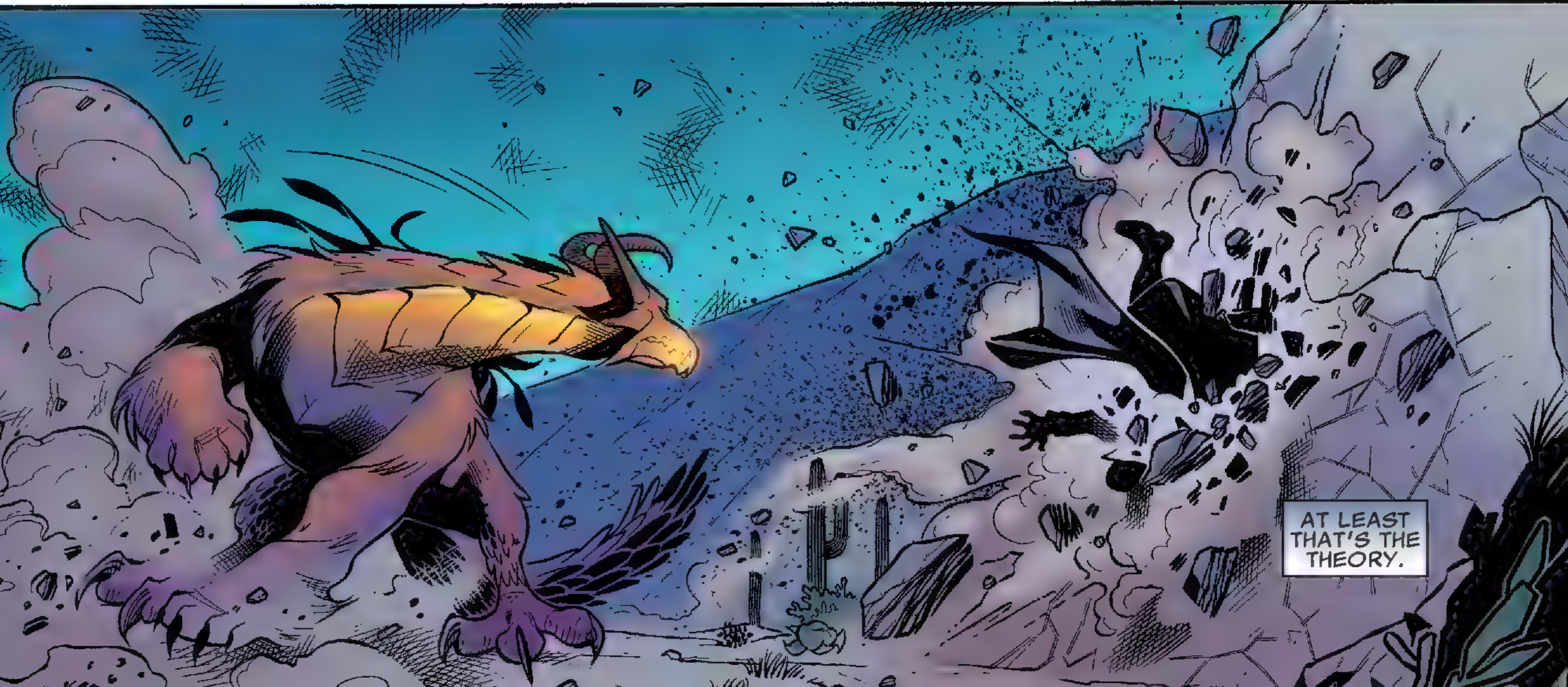
ITS SCALES BURN HOT TO THE TOUCH. I WANT TO SCREAM, BUT DON'T WANT TO GIVE IT THE SATISFACTION.

THEN MY SKIN AUTOMATICALLY THICKENS TO PROVIDE ME INSULATION...

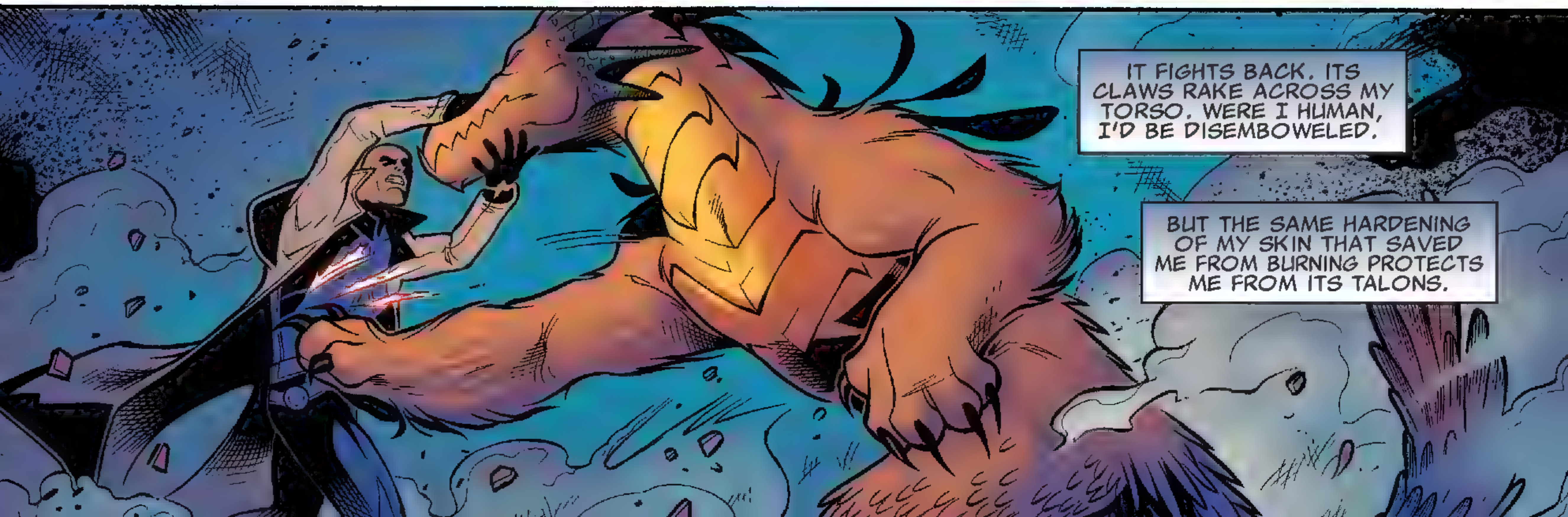
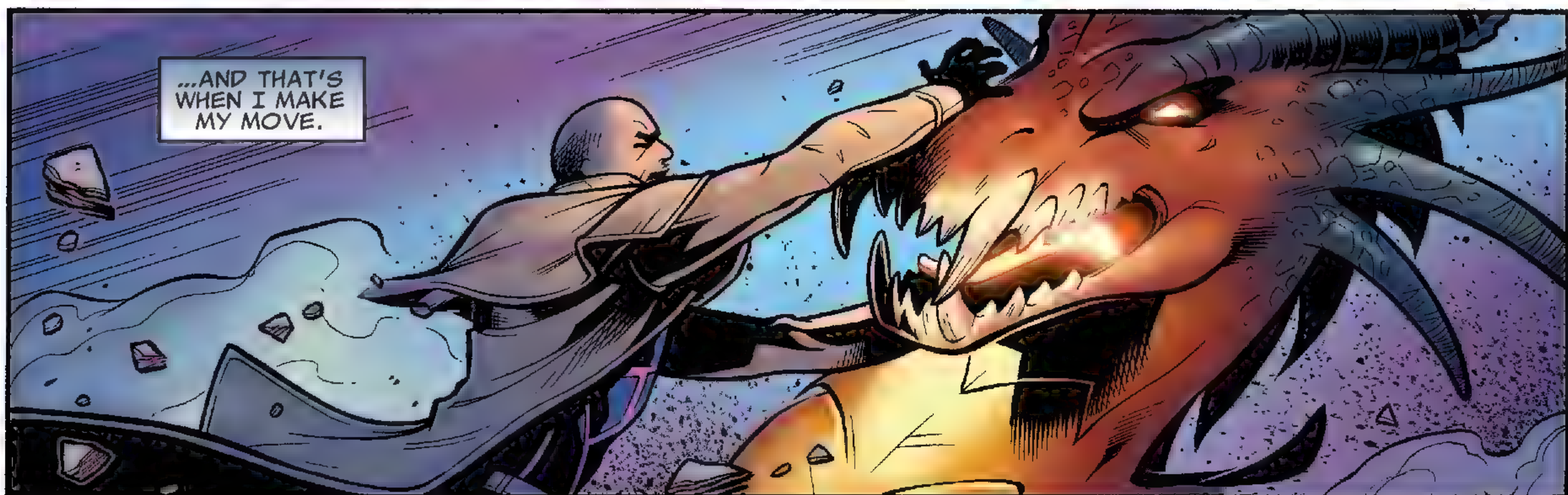
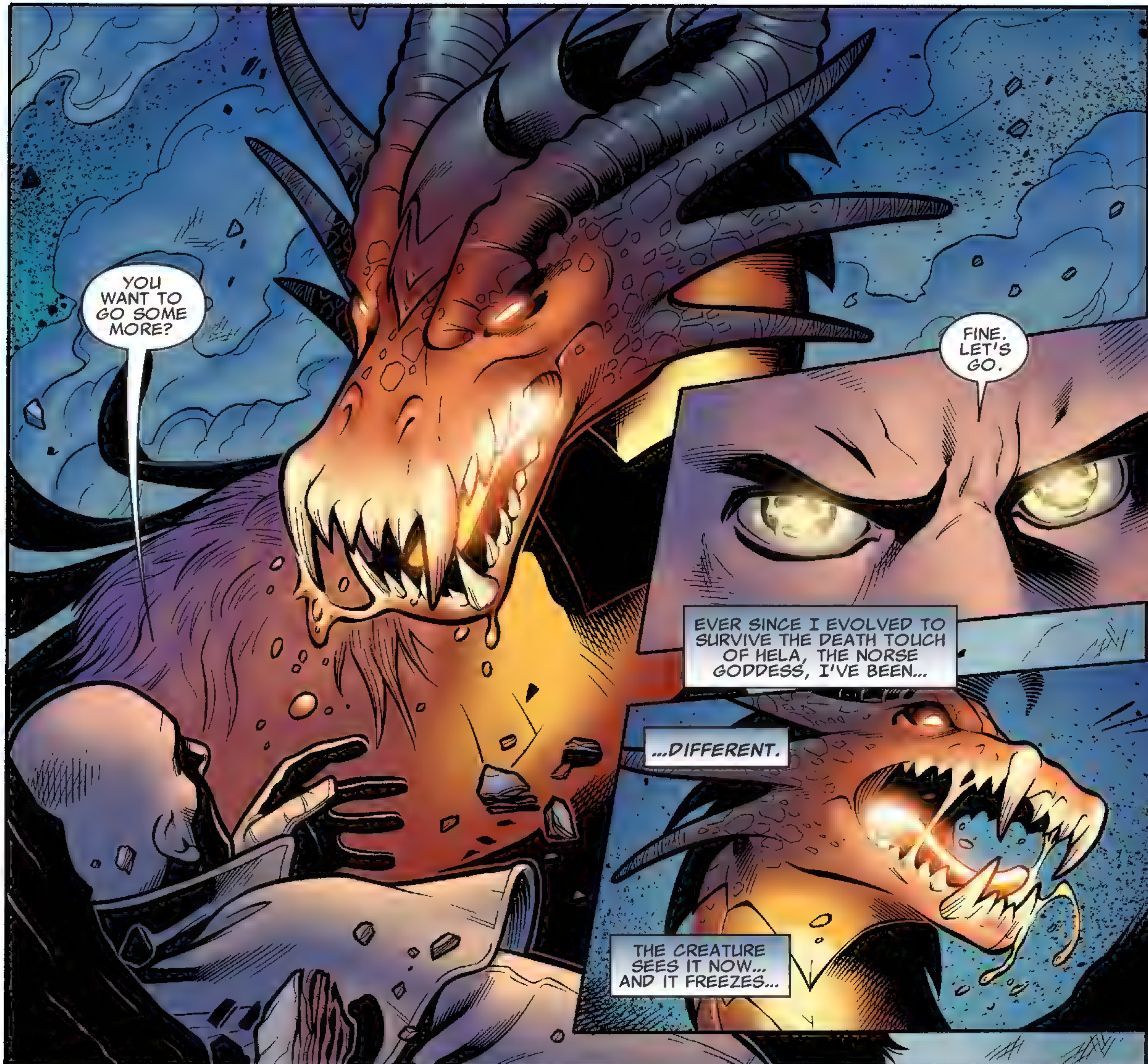


...AND I FEEL STRENGTH THAT WASN'T THERE BEFORE FLOWING THROUGH ME.

STRENGTH THAT WILL HELP ME DEAL WITH THIS THING THREATENING MY LIFE.



AT LEAST THAT'S THE THEORY.

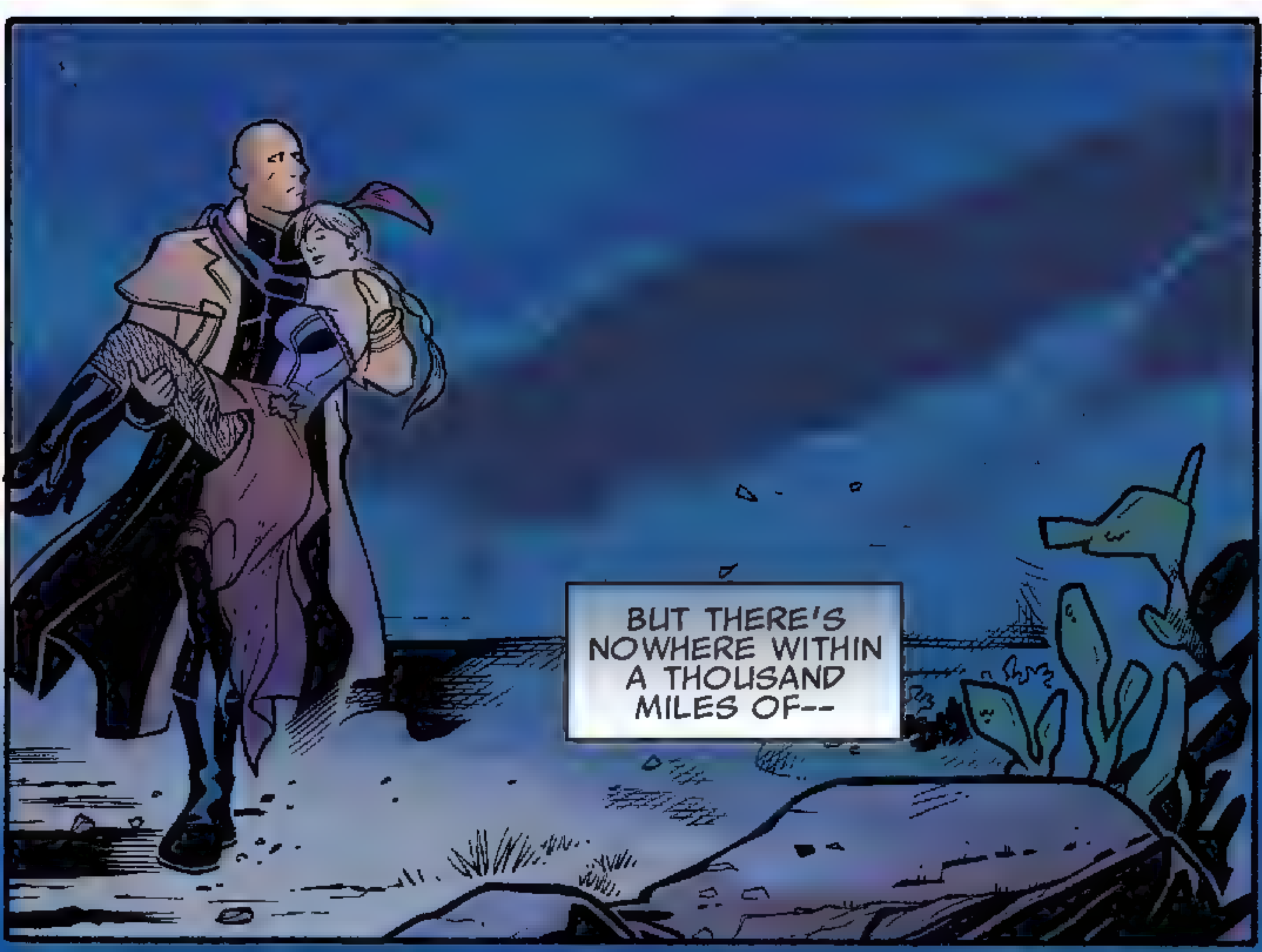




KILLING THINGS IS GETTING EASIER FOR ME. I WONDER IF I SHOULD BE WORRIED ABOUT THAT.

I'LL WORRY ABOUT IT LATER. RIGHT NOW, SHE NEEDS HELP.

SHE'S BADLY BANGED UP. SHE NEEDS HELP. MEDICAL AID.



BUT THERE'S NOWHERE WITHIN A THOUSAND MILES OF--



OOOOKAY... THAT'S WEIRD.

DID I JUST FALL THROUGH A TIME WARP OR SOMETHING?

HOW DID I WIND UP IN THE OLD WEST?

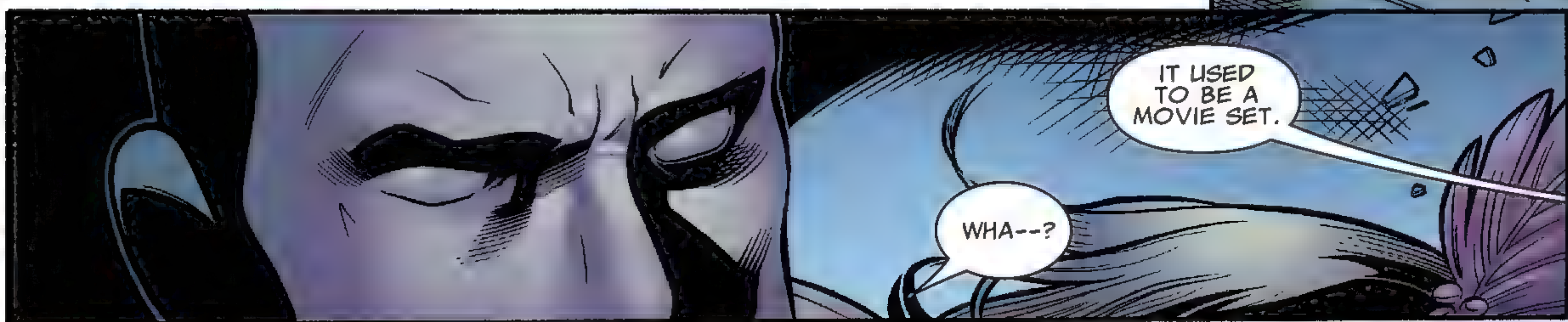


WELL, I'M NOT EXACTLY IN A POSITION TO KNOCK IT.



I DON'T GET IT.
WHAT KIND OF
OLD WESTERN
GHOST TOWN...

...HAS AN ATM?
AND AN OLD
ONE, AT THAT.



IT USED
TO BE A
MOVIE SET.

WHA--?



THAT'S
WHAT'CHER
WONDERING,
RIGHT? WHERE
THIS PLACE
CAME
FROM?

PRETTY
MUCH,
YEAH.

IT WAS A
SET. FILMED A
LOTTA MOVIES
HERE BACK IN THE
OL' DAYS. FULLY
FUNCTIONAL TOWN.
THEN THEY
STOPPED MAKING
WESTERNS...

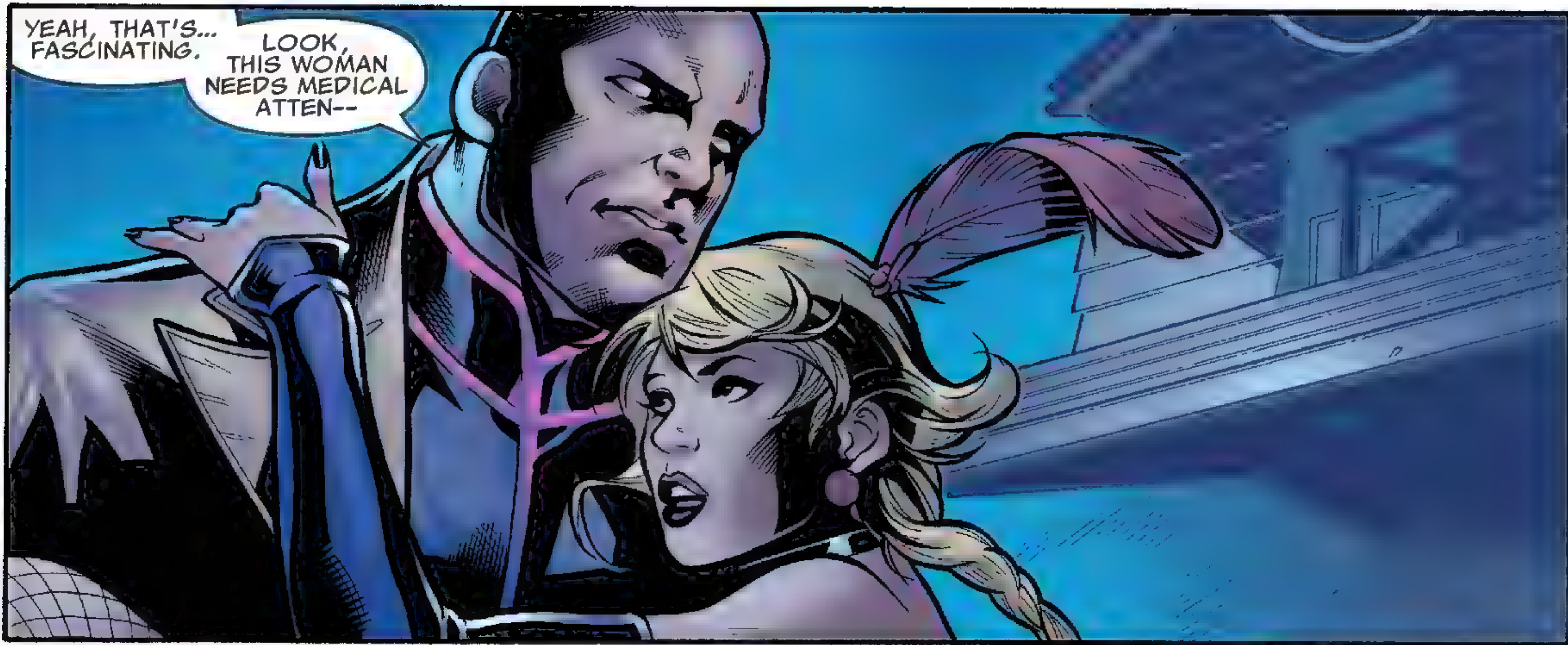


AND THE
OWNERS TRIED
TURNING IT INTO
A TOURIST
ATTRACTION.

IN THE
MIDDLE O'
NOWHERE. CAN
YA BELIEVE
IT?

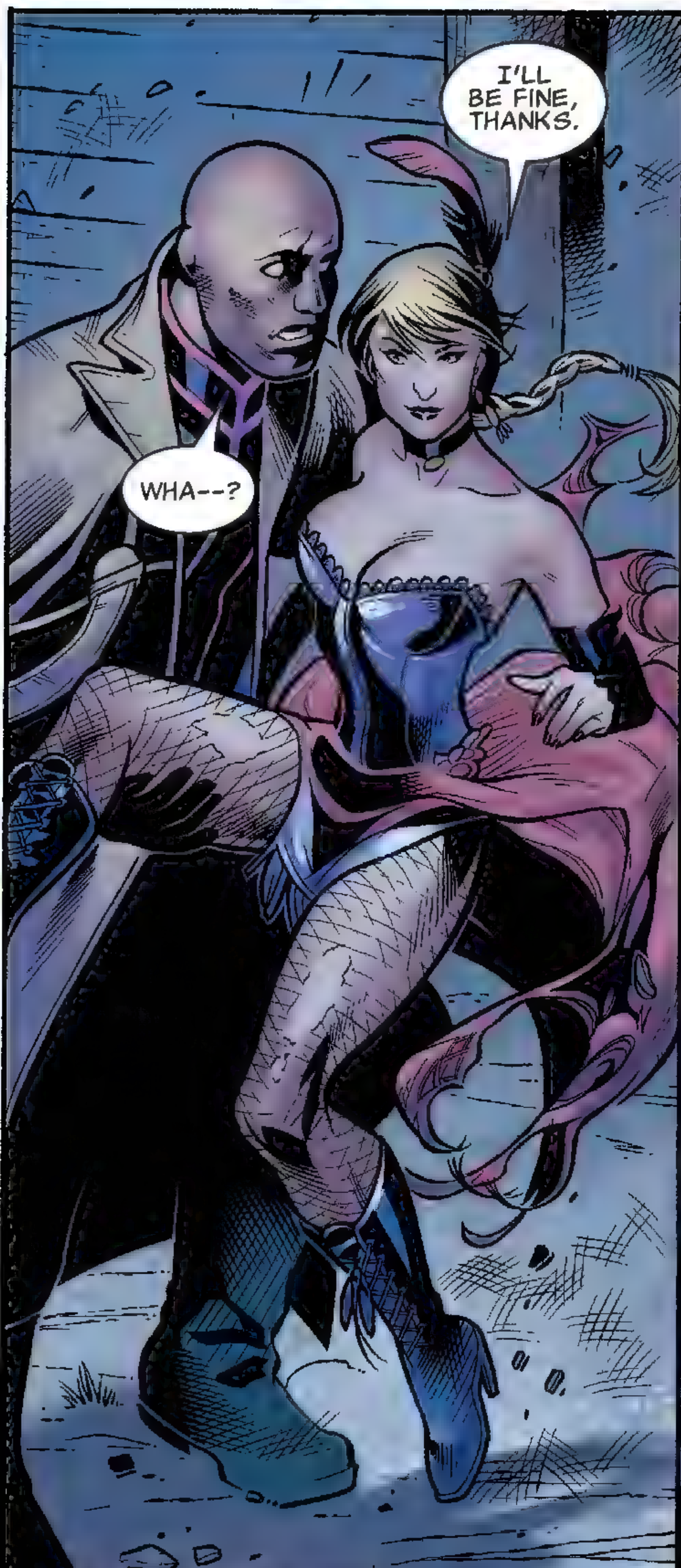
PLACE SHUT
DOWN FIFTEEN
YEARS AGO. LEFT
EVERYTHING BEHIND,
INCLUDING
COSTUMES.

SQUATTERS,
HOMELESS FOLKS
SHOWED UP AND...
STAYED.



YEAH, THAT'S...
FASCINATING.

LOOK,
THIS WOMAN
NEEDS MEDICAL
ATTEN--



WHA--?

I'LL
BE FINE,
THANKS.



THANK
YOU FOR
SAVING
ME.

I...I
DON'T
UNDERSTAND.
ARE YOU
OK--?

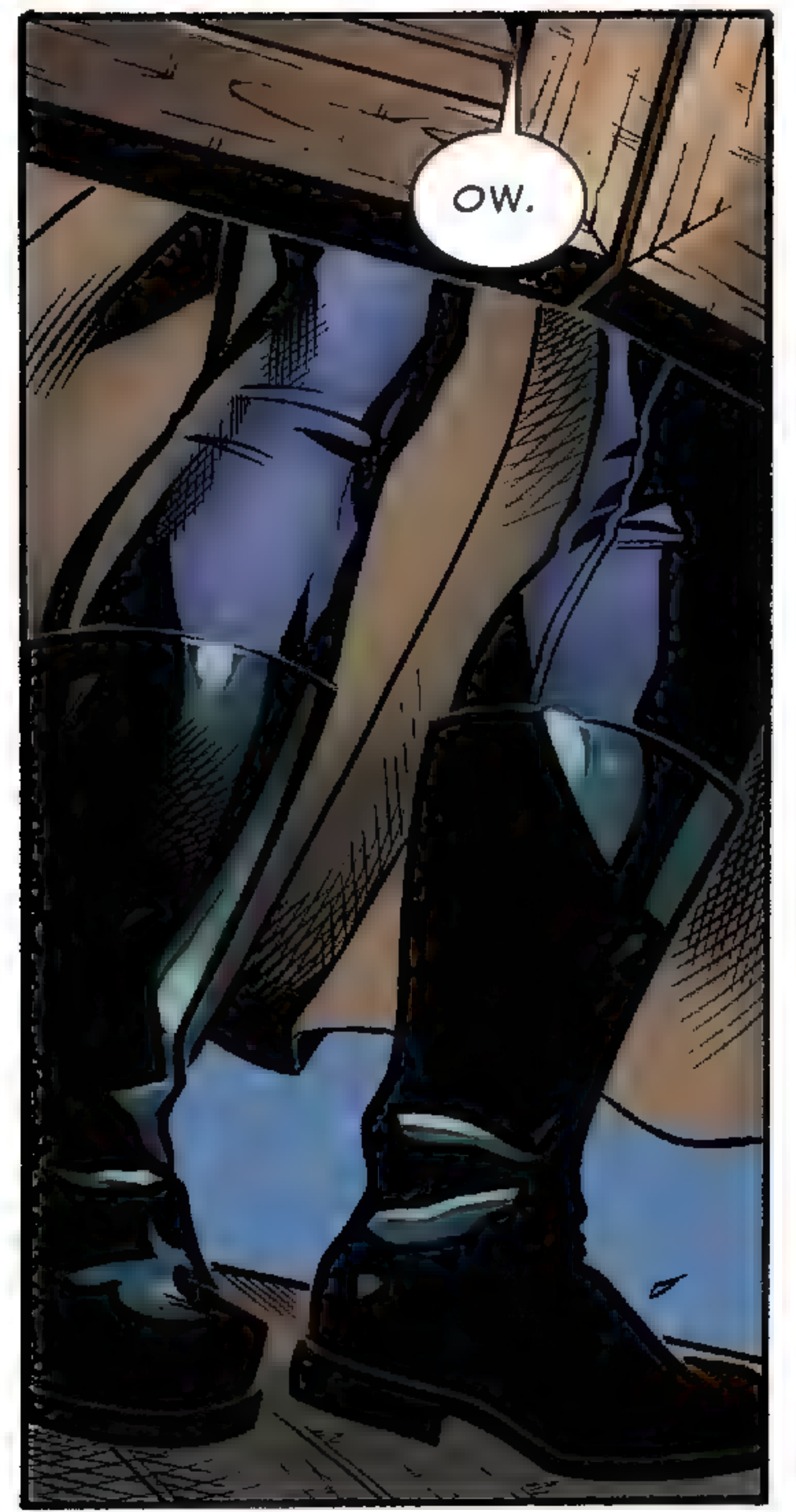
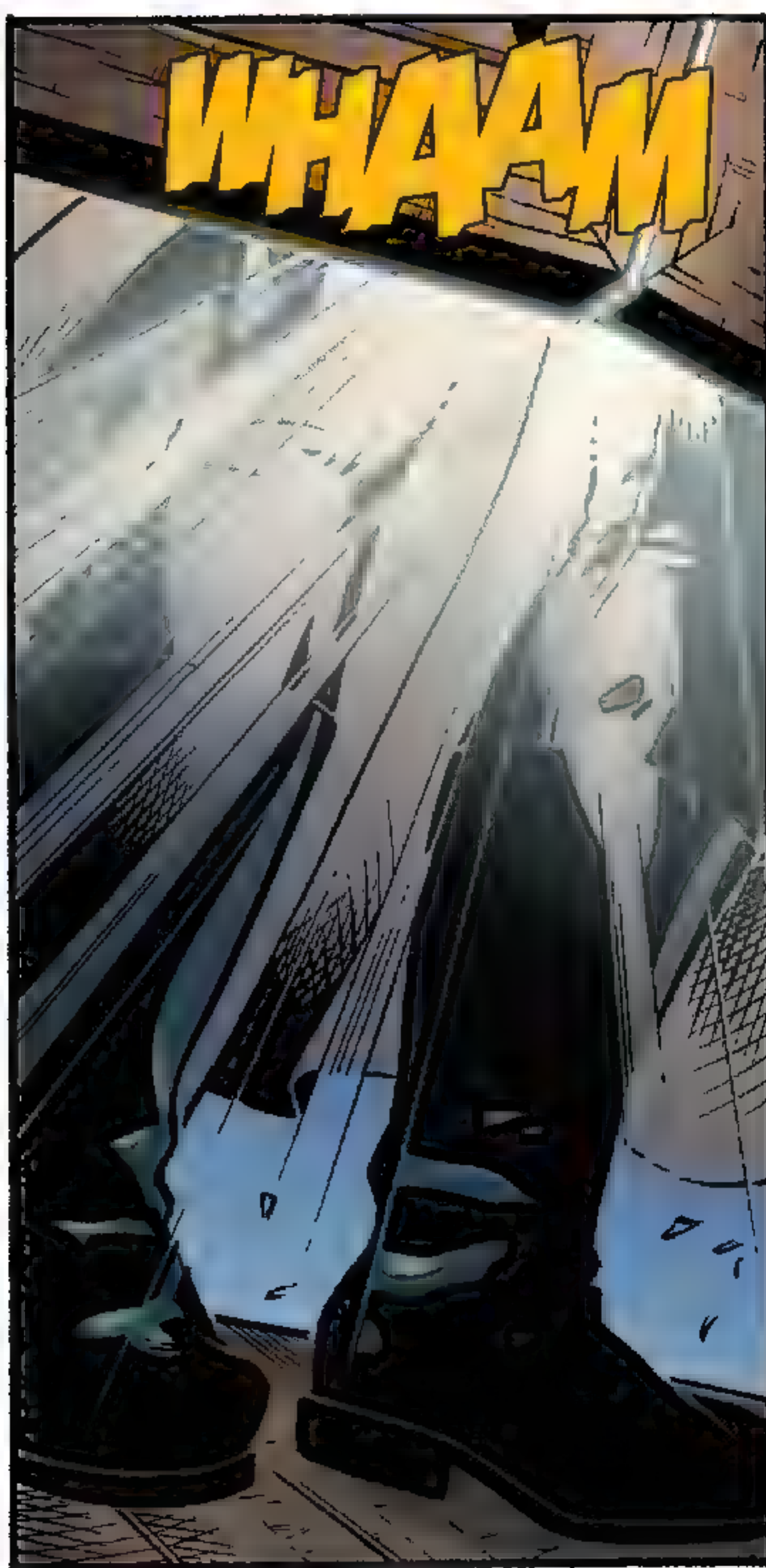
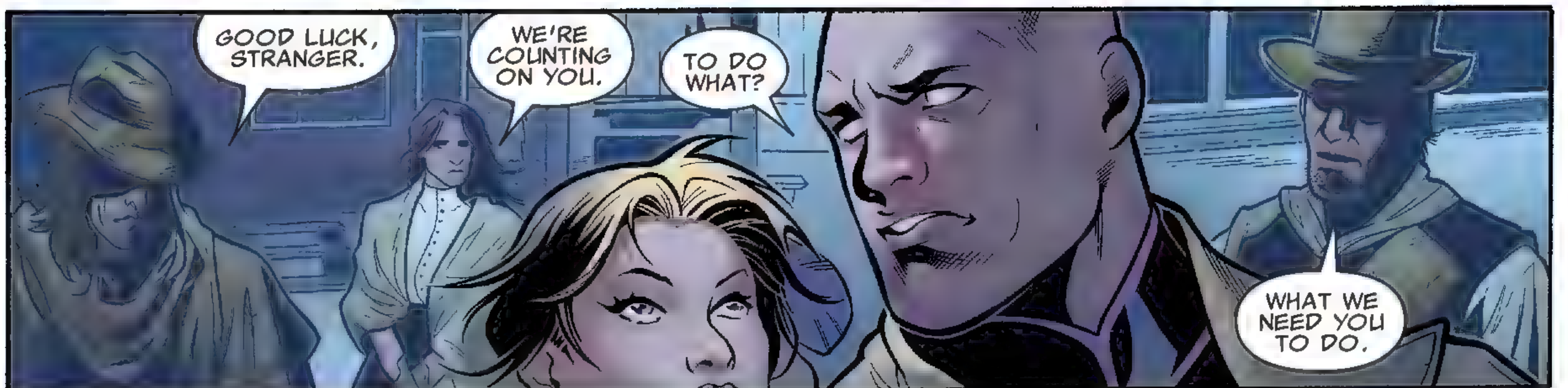
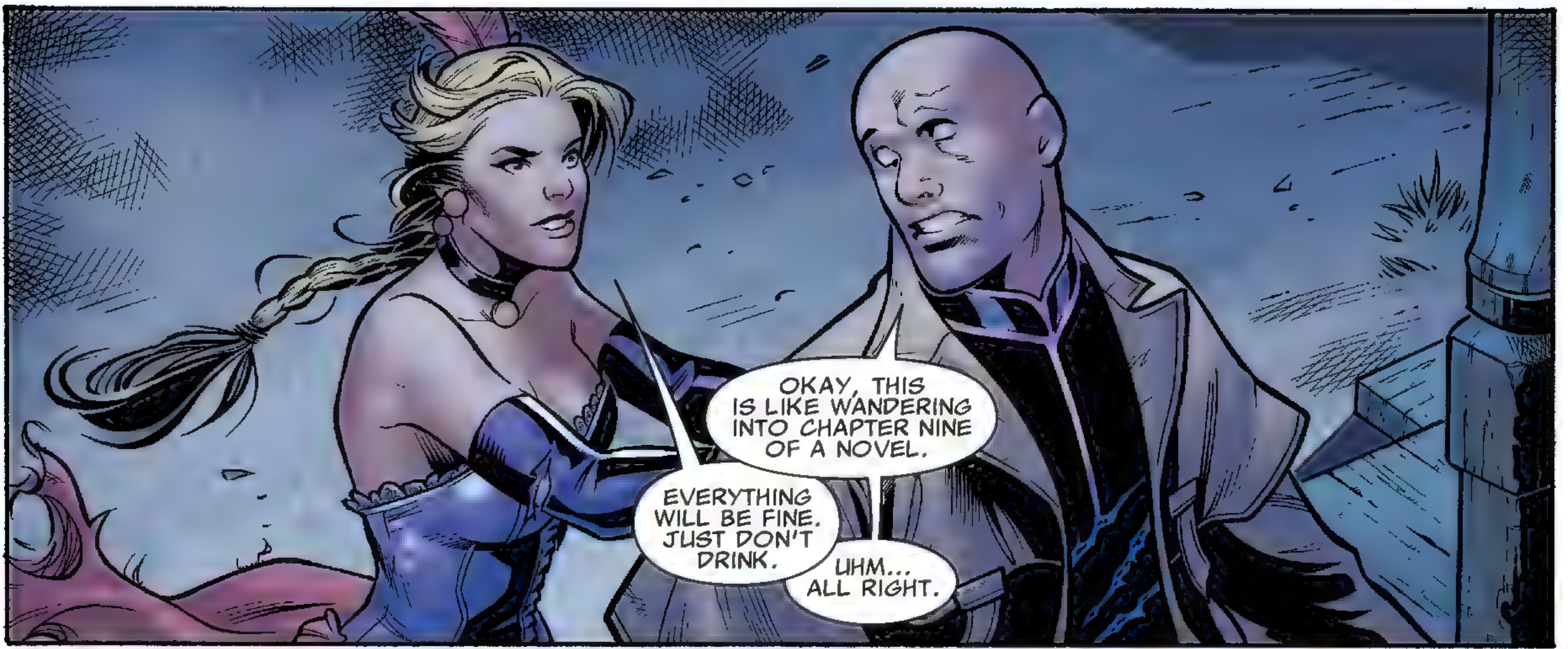


MMMM.

YOU
TASTE LIKE
DEATH.

I'M...NOT SURE
WHAT TO SAY
TO THAT...







THAT WAS ENTERTAINING.

GLAD I COULD OBLIGE.

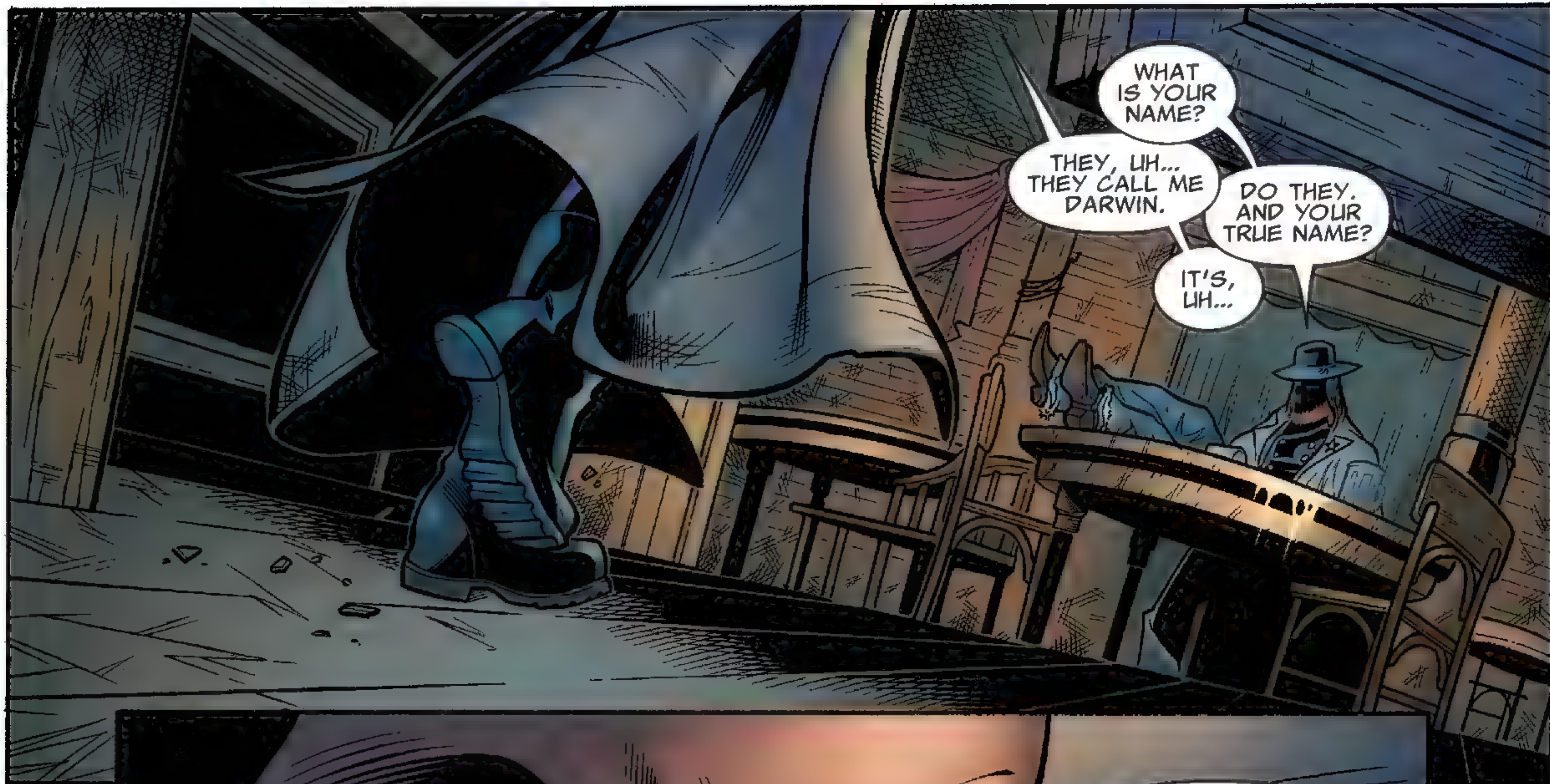


SO...YOU'RE THE STRANGER WHO'S COME TO TAKE ME DOWN.

SIT. TAKE A LOAD OFF.

WE'LL TALK, AS MEN DO.

EXCEPT WITH MORE WIT AND BETTER GRAMMAR.

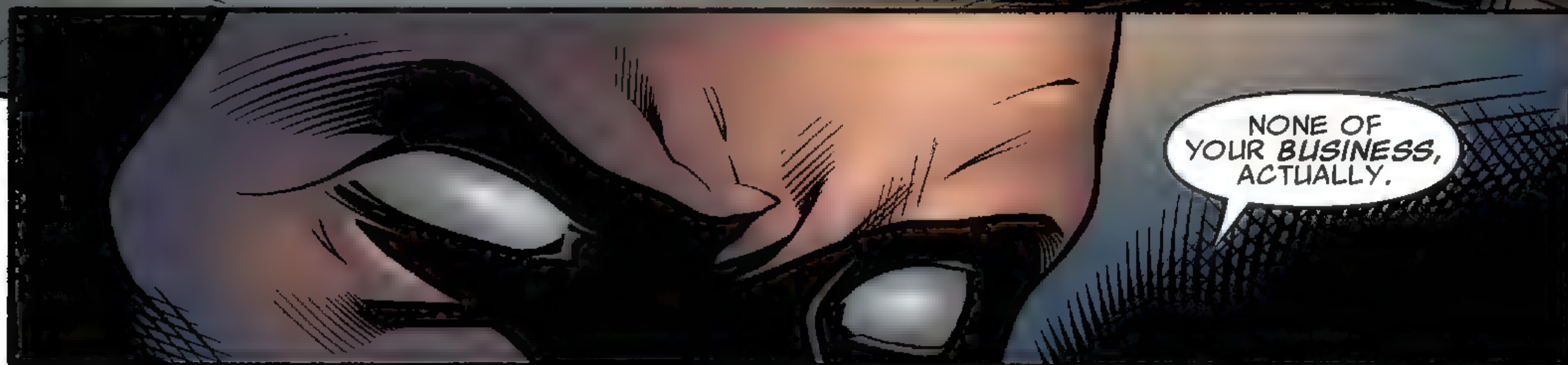


WHAT IS YOUR NAME?

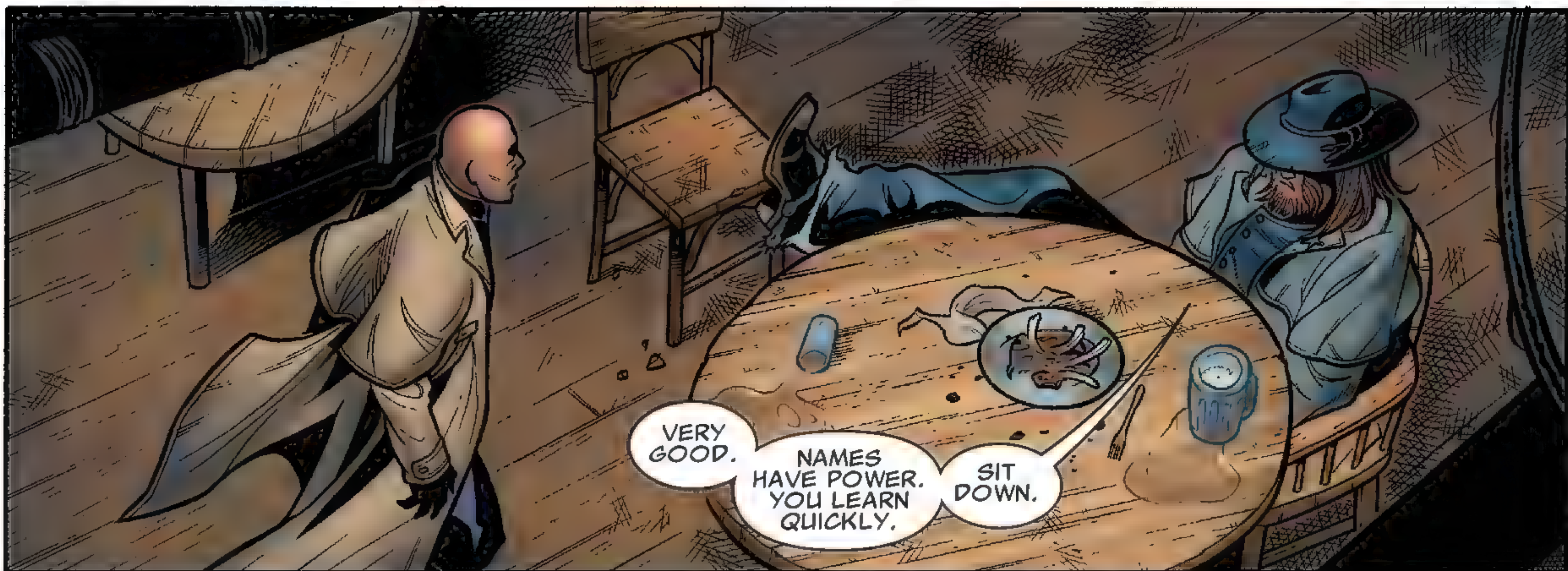
THEY, UH... THEY CALL ME DARWIN.

DO THEY. AND YOUR TRUE NAME?

IT'S, UH...



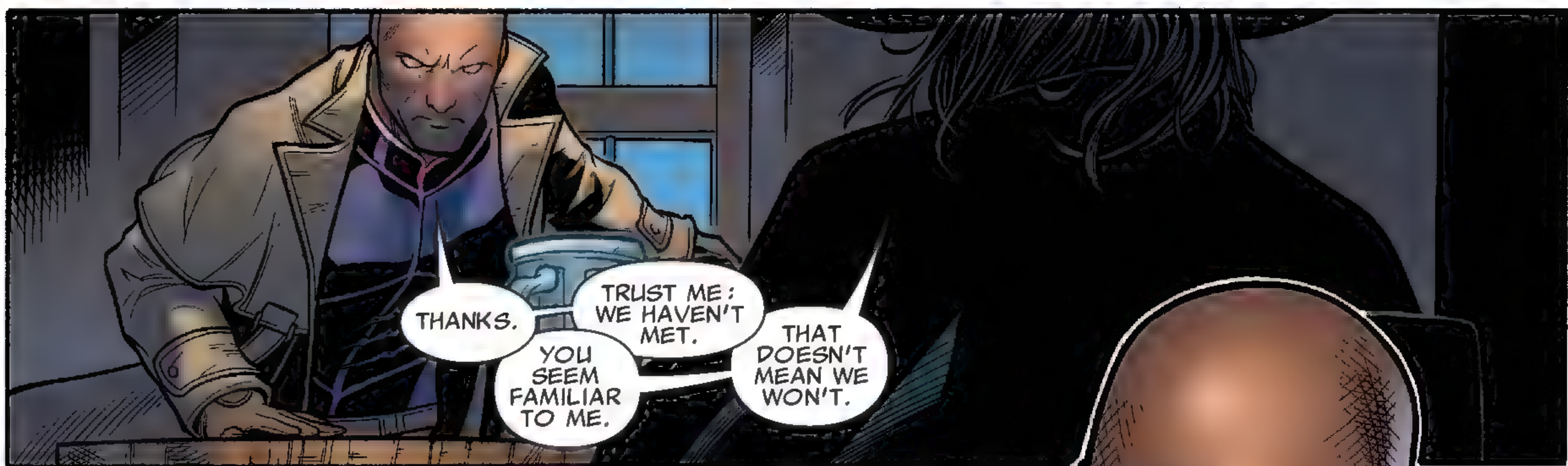
NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS, ACTUALLY.



VERY GOOD.

NAMES HAVE POWER. YOU LEARN QUICKLY.

SIT DOWN.



THANKS.

YOU SEEM FAMILIAR TO ME.

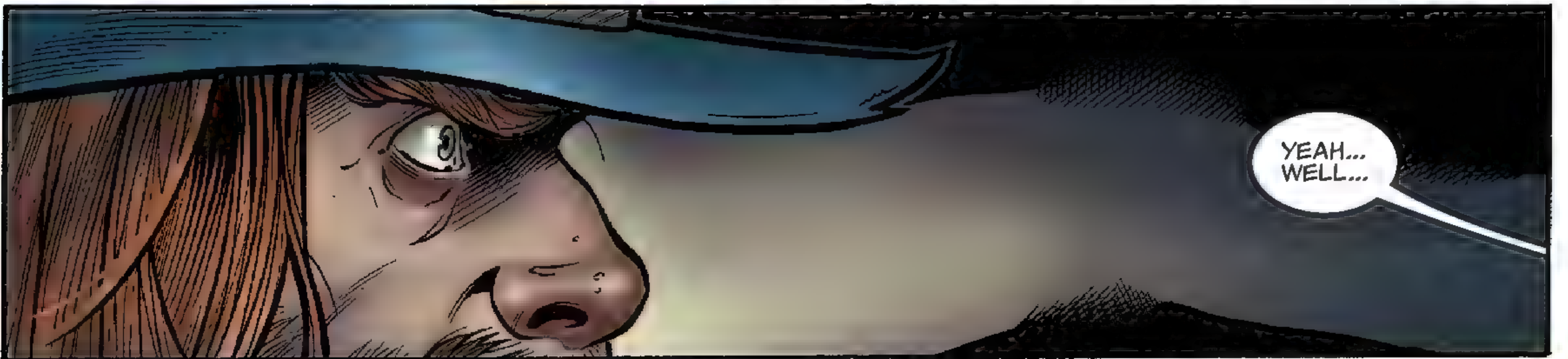
TRUST ME: WE HAVEN'T MET.

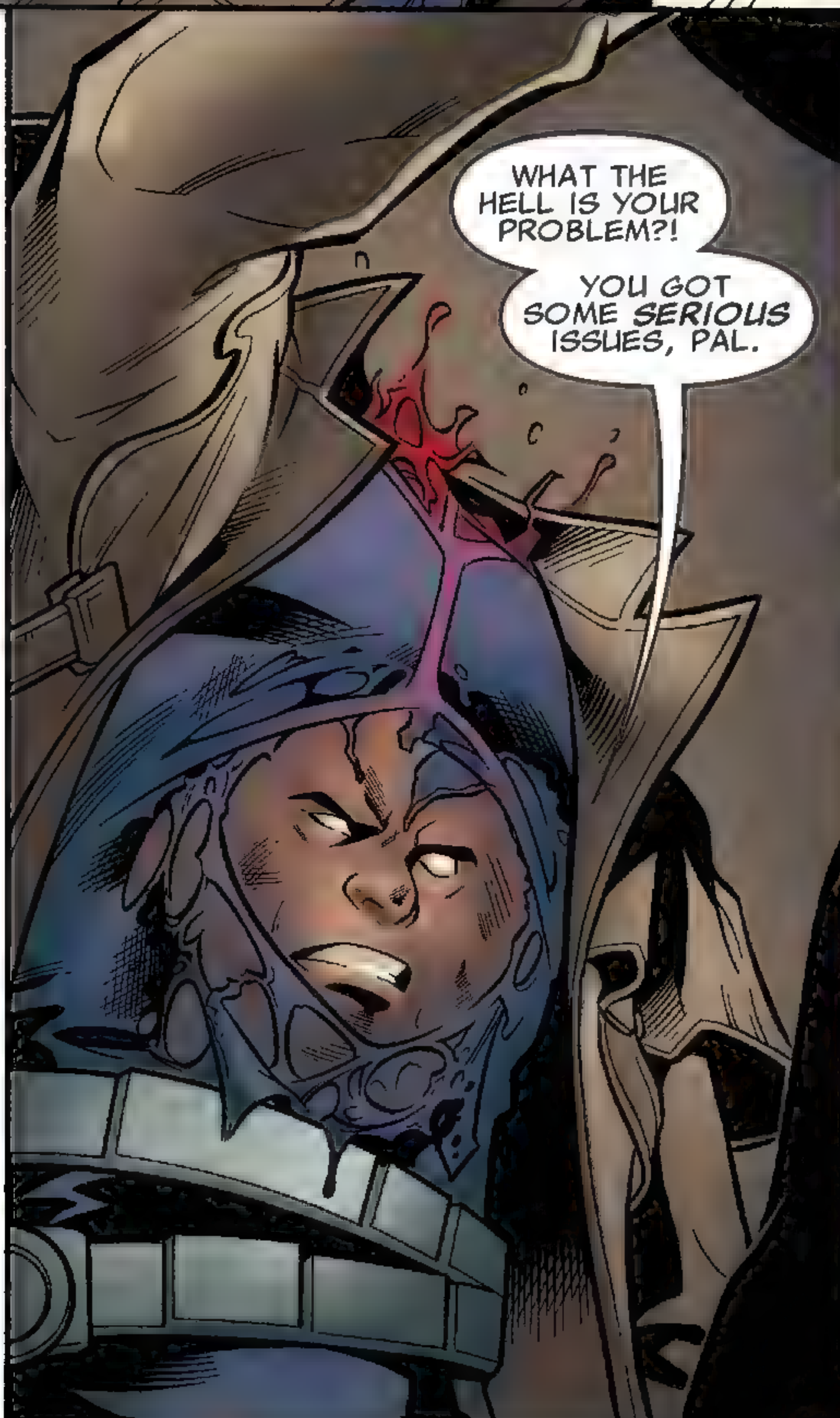
THAT DOESN'T MEAN WE WON'T.

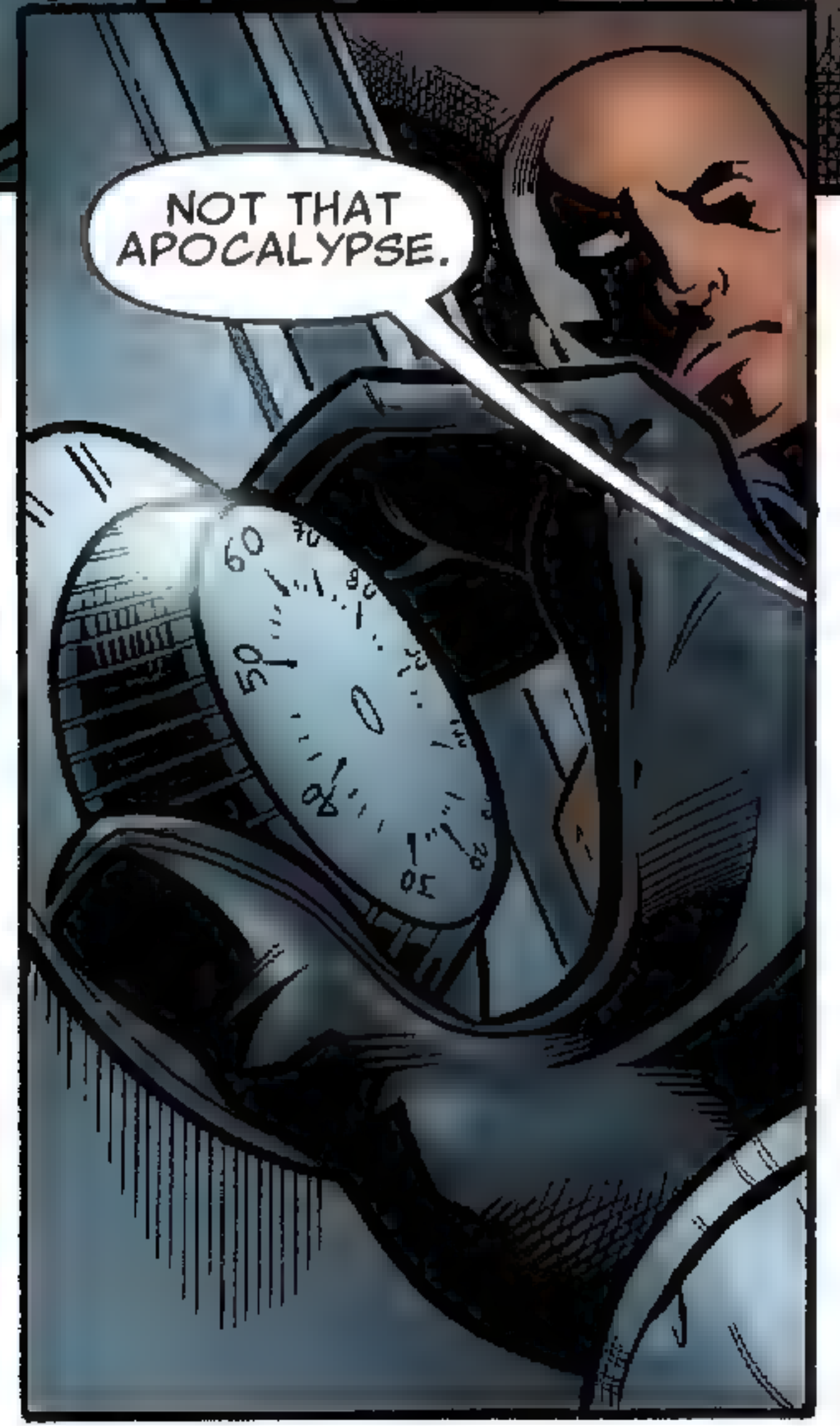
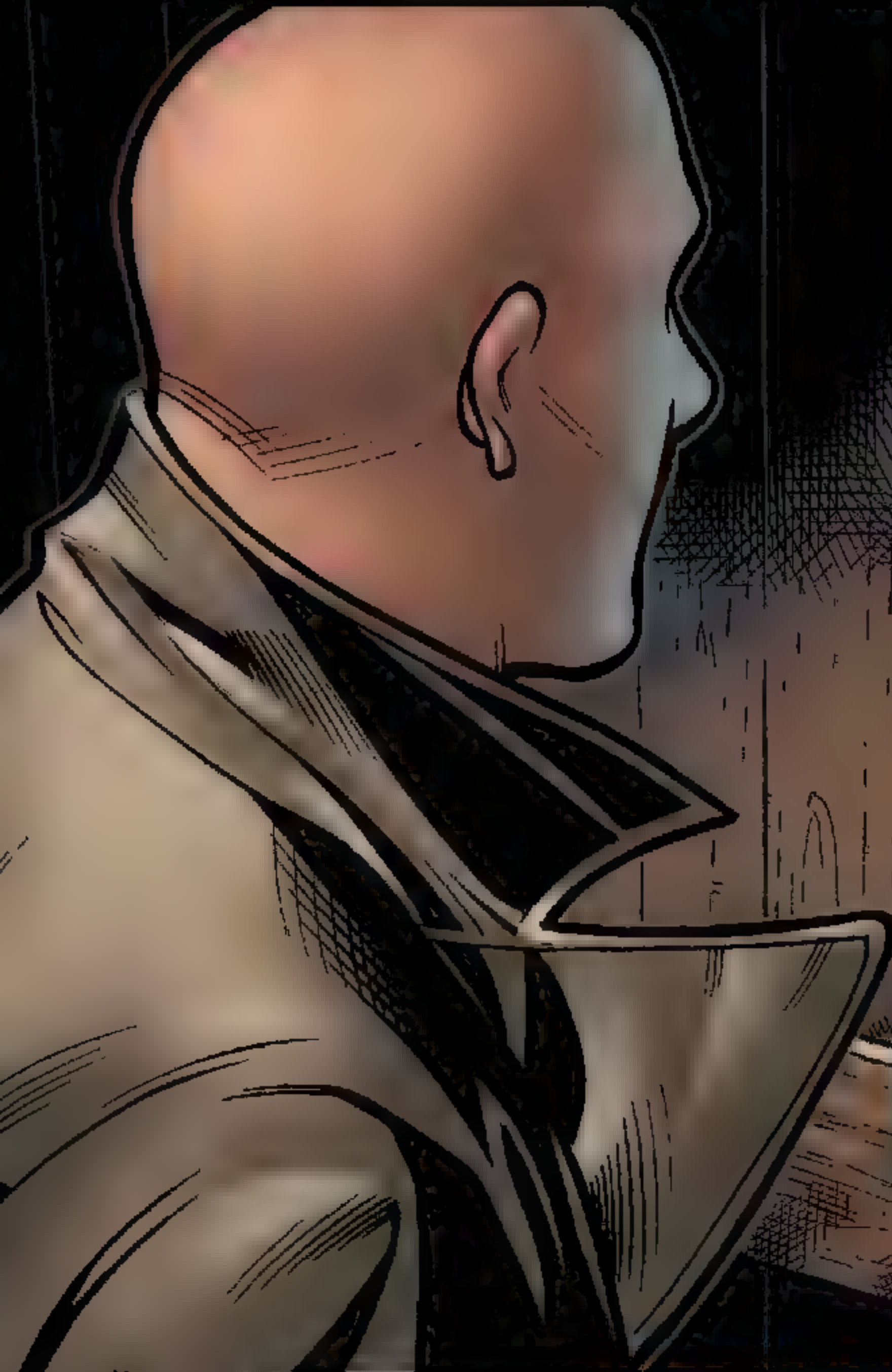
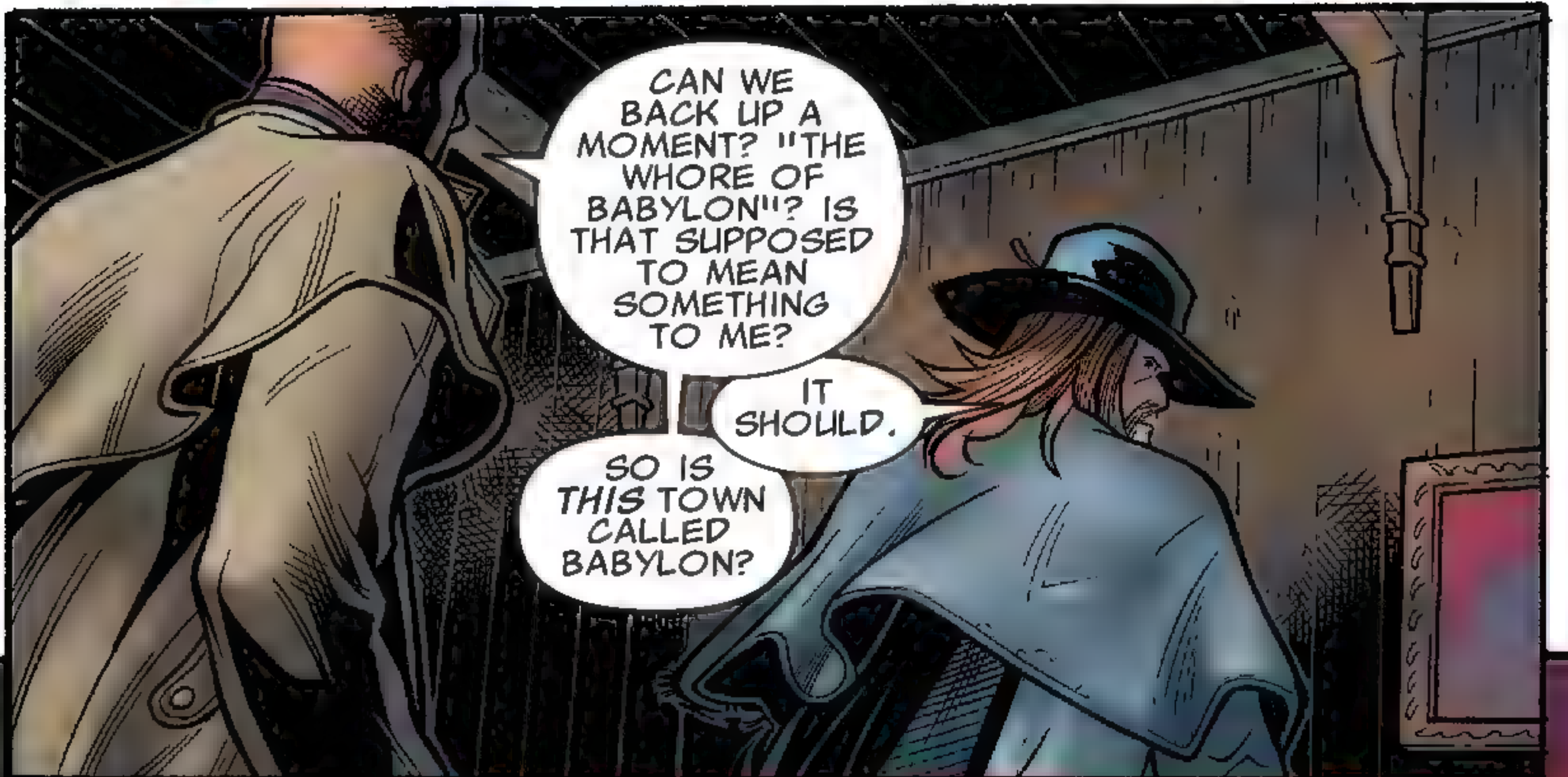
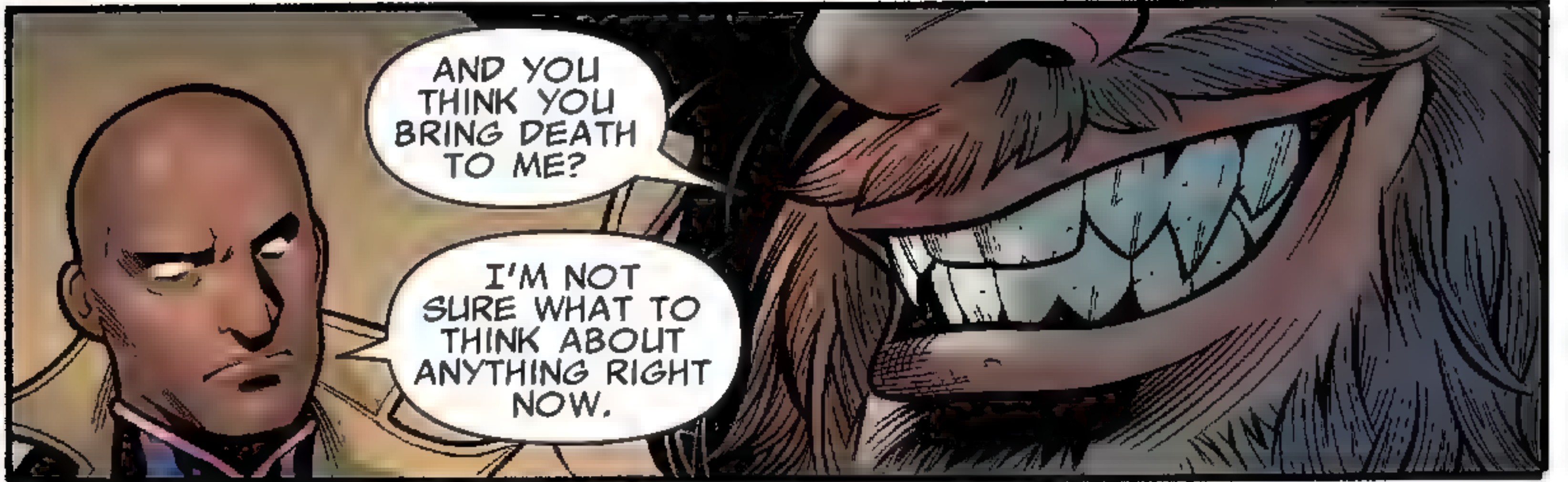


I'M NOT SURE I UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU--











WHAT, YOU MEAN LIKE... "END OF THE WORLD" APOCALYPSE?

THE BEING, APOCALYPSE, YOU'VE ENCOUNTERED, AND HIS SO-CALLED HORSEMEN...

...THEY'RE MERE SHADOWS OF WHAT'S COMING.

WHY DO YOU SAY THAT?



BECAUSE THEM, YOU COULD STOP. BUT THE REAL DEALS? UNLIKELY.



SO THE END OF THE WORLD IS NIGH, IS WHAT YOU'RE SAYING.

YES. THE COMING OF THE BEAST OF THE EARTH, NAMELY ME...

THE BEAST? LIKE, THE SIGN OF 666 BEAST?

OH, GOOD. YOU'RE NOT COMPLETELY IGNORANT.



YOU KILLED MY PET, DIDN'T YOU, THE SIRRUSH.

WELL, THEN...

THAT DRAGON THING? YEAH.



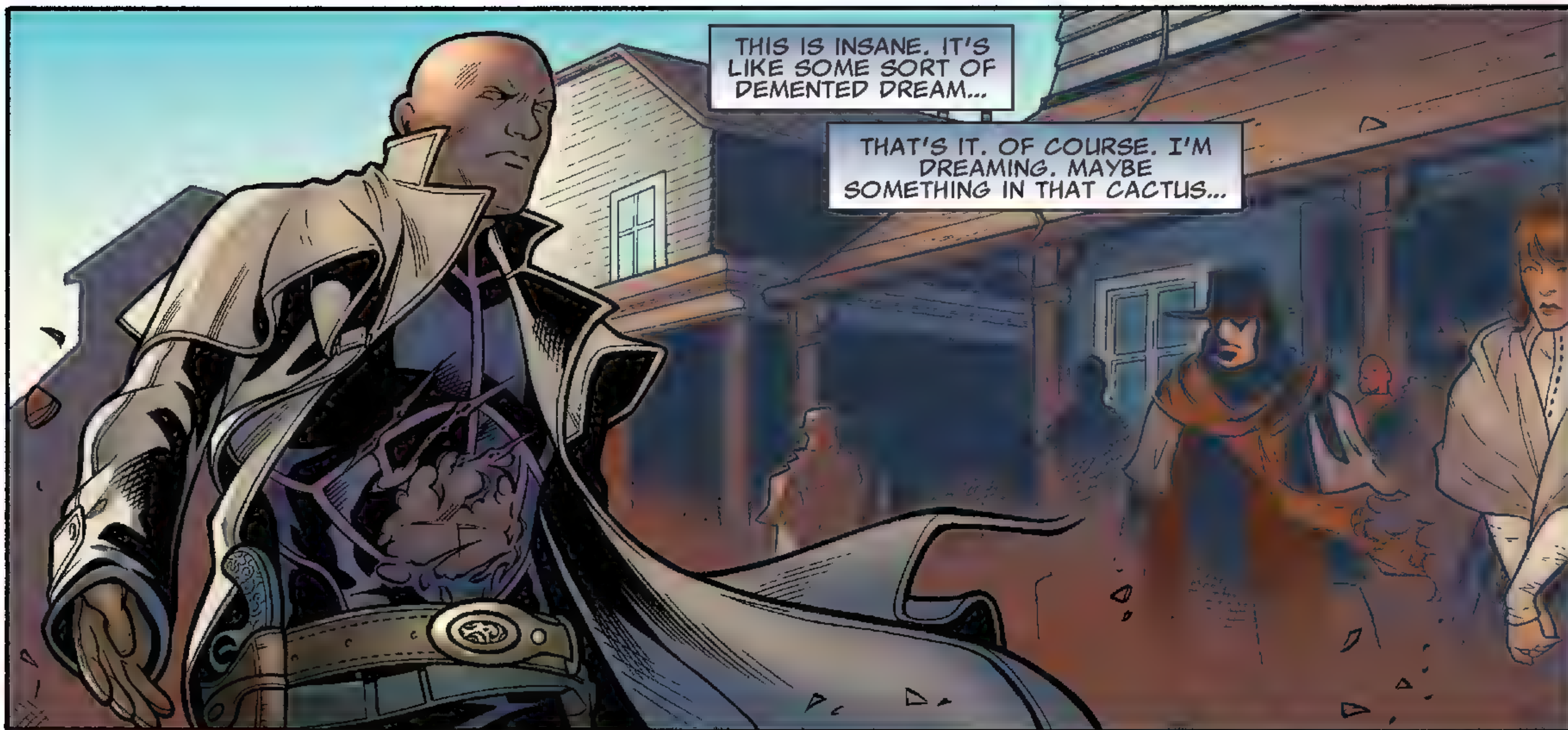
...IF YOU HAVE THE STRENGTH OF WILL, AND THE PROPER WEAPON...

...YOU MAY BE ABLE TO KILL ME AND AVERT THE APOCALYPSE AFTER ALL.

WHY THREE SIX-SHOOTERS?



WHAT PART OF 6-6-6 WAS UNCLEAR?



THIS IS INSANE. IT'S LIKE SOME SORT OF DEMENTED DREAM...

THAT'S IT. OF COURSE. I'M DREAMING. MAYBE SOMETHING IN THAT CACTUS...



THESE GUNS... THEY'RE NOT LIKE NORMAL WEAPONS, DARWIN.

BUT YOU STRIDE TWO WORLDS, AND SO WE ARE IN UNKNOWN TERRITORY. EXCITING, ISN'T IT.

IF GOD HIMSELF WERE SHOT BY ONE, HE WOULD BLEED.



NOT REALLY. I'VE FIGURED OUT I'M DREAMING.

OH, HAVE YOU? WELL... BEST OF LUCK WITH THAT.

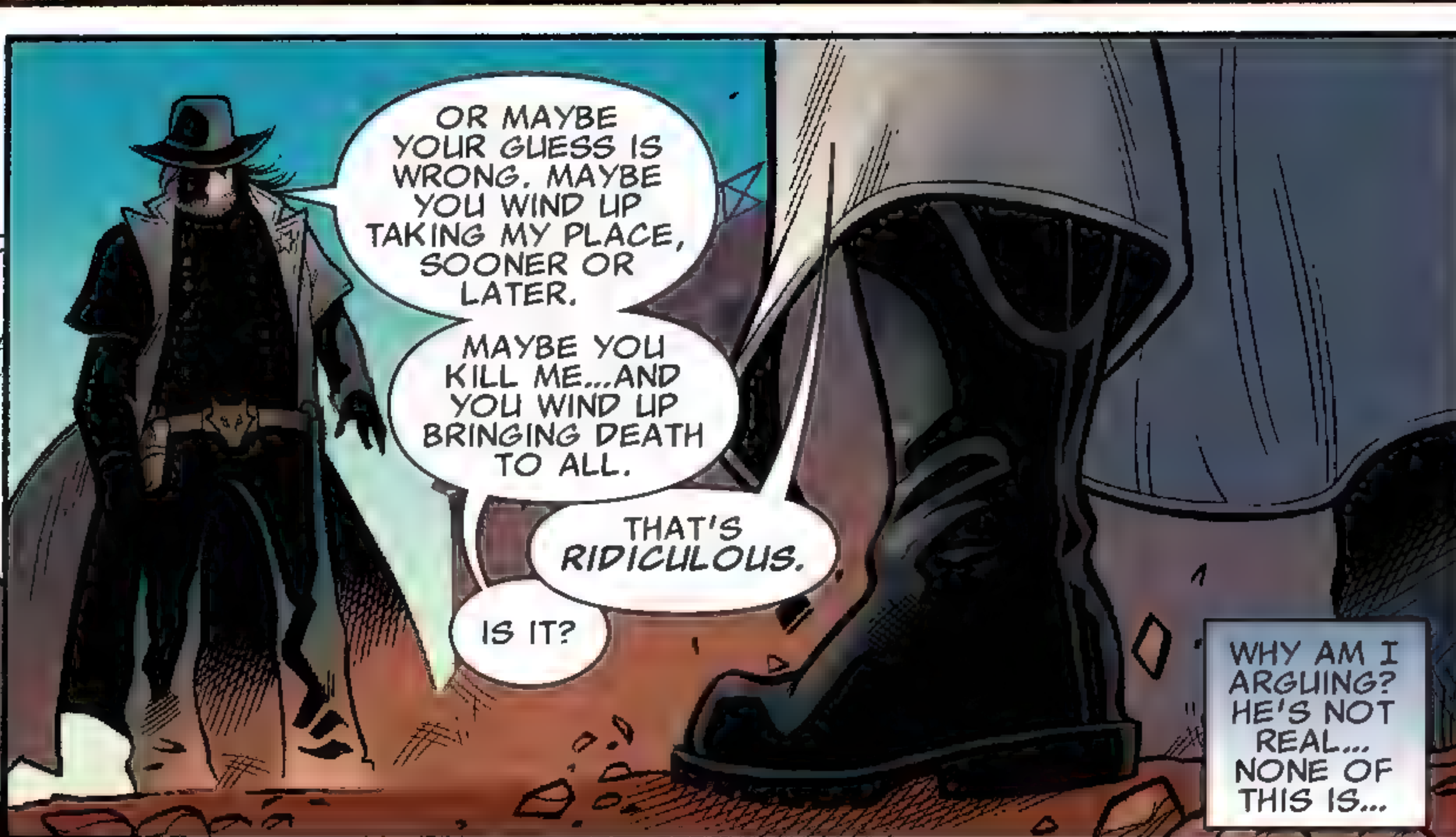
TELL ME: IN YOUR DREAMS, HAVE YOU FIGURED OUT WHAT HAPPENS SHOULD YOU KILL ME?

DO YOU THINK YOU JUST WALK INTO THE SUNSET WITH MY WHORE?



I GUESS.

MAYBE YOUR GUESS IS RIGHT.



OR MAYBE YOUR GUESS IS WRONG. MAYBE YOU WIND UP TAKING MY PLACE, SOONER OR LATER.

MAYBE YOU KILL ME...AND YOU WIND UP BRINGING DEATH TO ALL.

THAT'S RIDICULOUS.

IS IT?

WHY AM I ARGUING? HE'S NOT REAL... NONE OF THIS IS...



DARWIN...
HAVEN'T YOU
FIGURED OUT
THAT YOU'RE
IMMORTAL? HUMANS...
EVEN SUPERIOR
ONES...AREN'T
DESIGNED FOR
THAT "GIFT."

THEY NEED
TO BE GROUNDED.
ANCHORED.
IMMORTALITY CUTS
THAT ANCHOR
CHAIN.



DON'T LET
HIM GET INTO
YOUR HEAD! IT'LL
MAKE YOU
VULNERABLE!

HE...HE
WON'T. NOTHING
HE SAYS
MATTERS. HE...



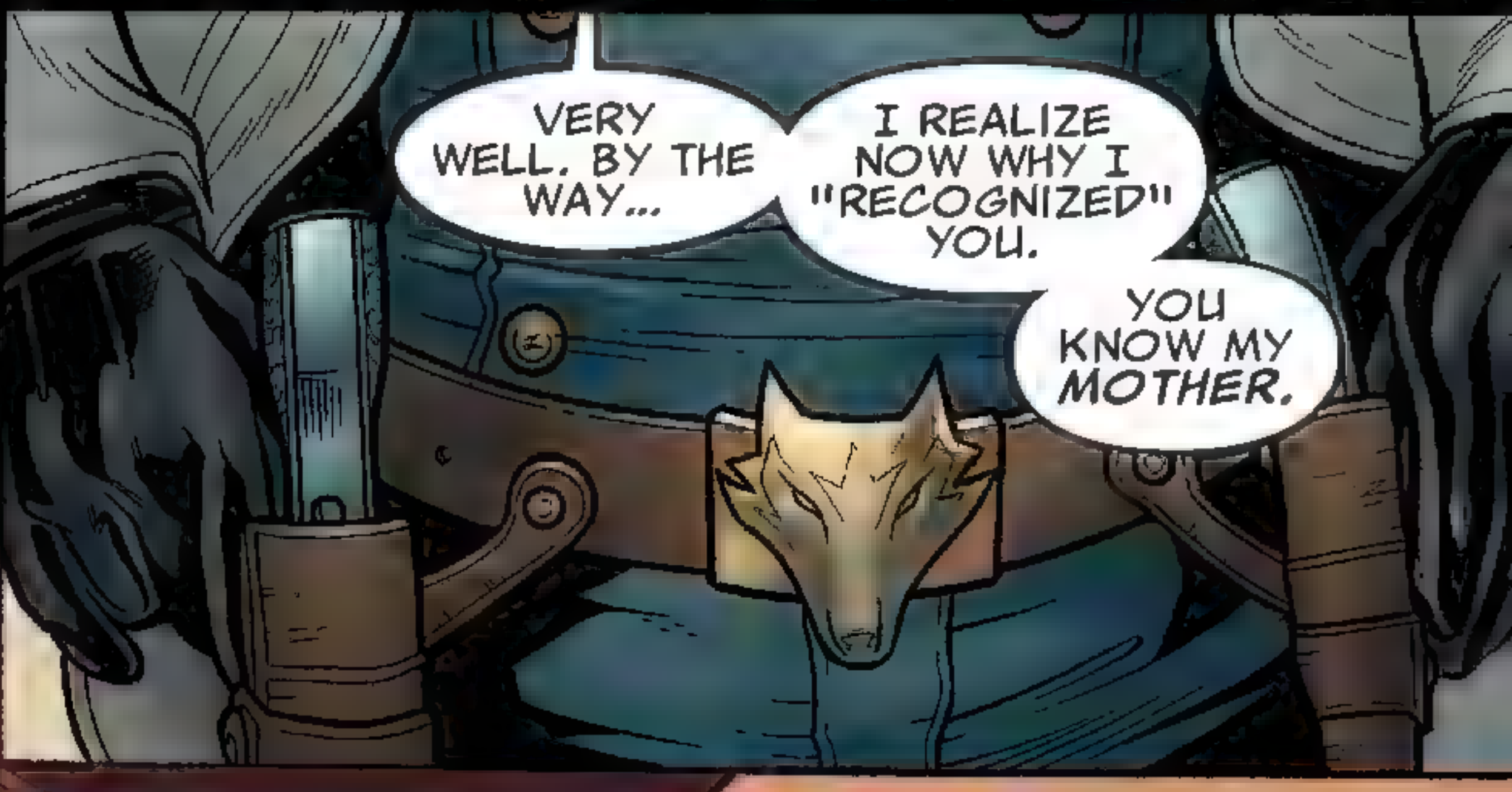
YOU'LL
JUST DRIFT
THROUGH
EXISTENCE,
WATCHING
EVERYONE AND
EVERYTHING
AROUND YOU
DIE.

IT WILL
DRIVE YOU
MAD.

IT WILL
DRIVE YOU HERE,
AND YOU'LL WANT
THE WORLD TO
END SO THAT YOU
CAN FINALLY
KNOW PEACE.



YOU
PLANNING
TO DRAW, OR
JUST TALK ME
TO DEATH?



VERY
WELL. BY THE
WAY...

I REALIZE
NOW WHY I
"RECOGNIZED"
YOU.

YOU
KNOW MY
MOTHER.



WHAT?
AND
WHO'S---



RAHNE
SINCLAIR.

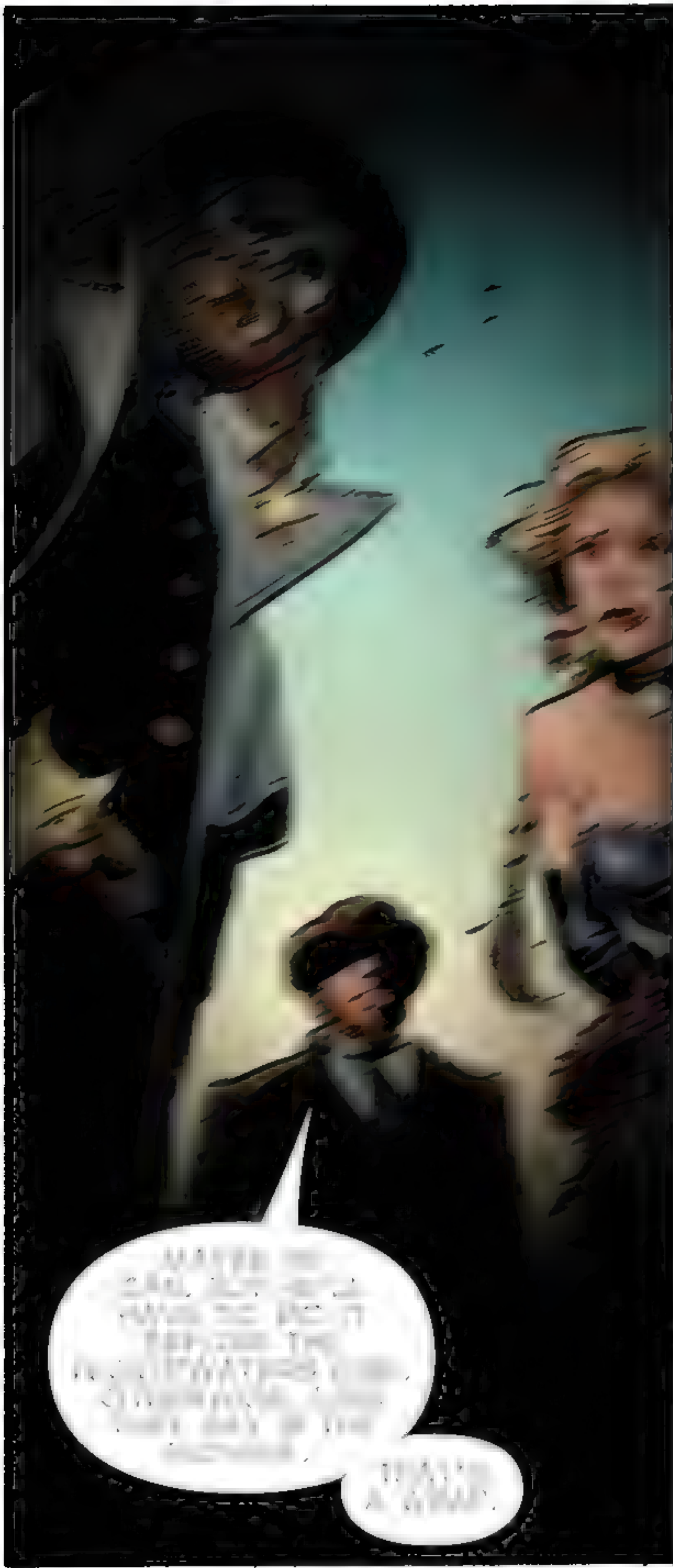
WHAT?

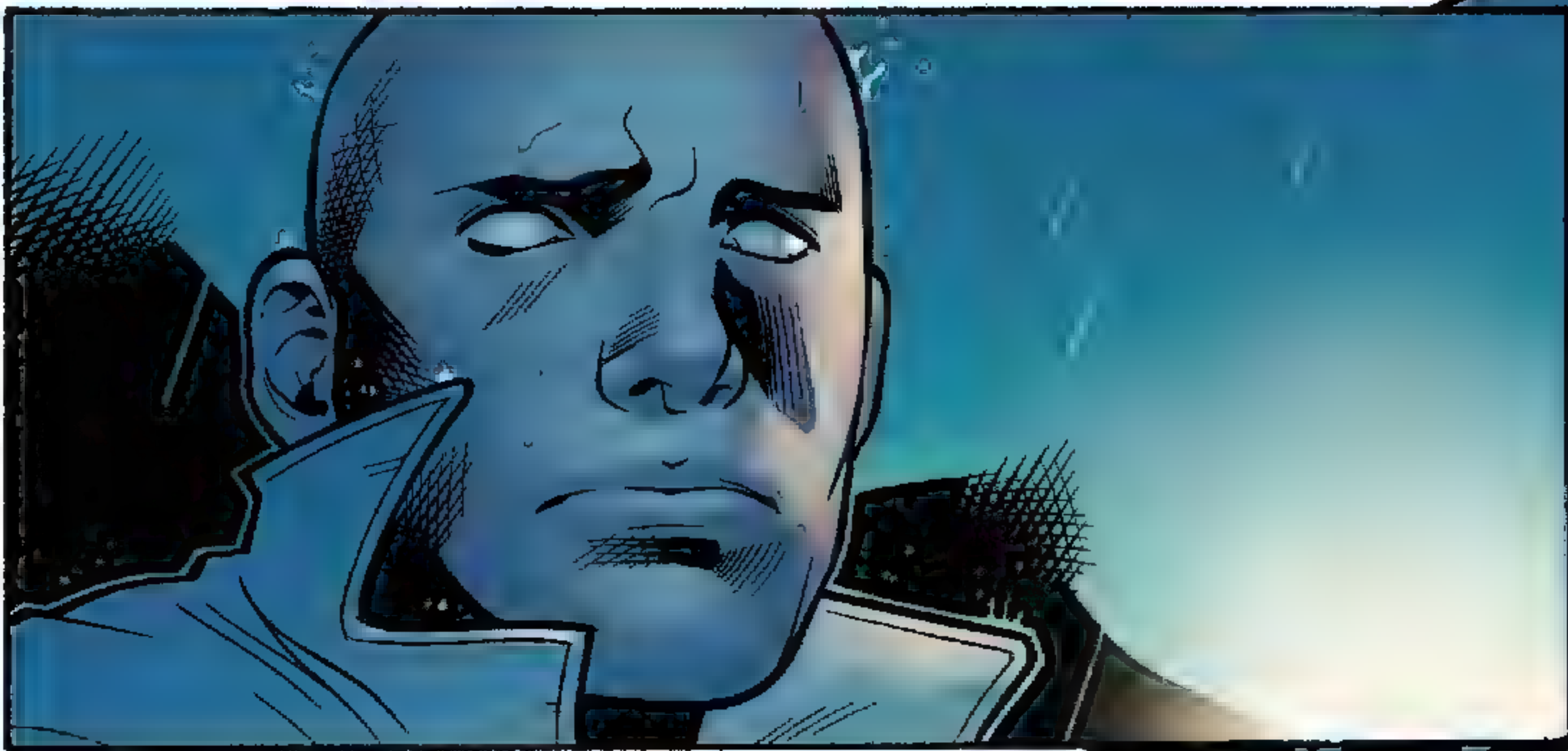
MY BRAIN SCREAMS
AT ME TO DRAW MY
GUN, BUT MY ARM
REFUSES TO MOVE.

THE AIR IS
ALIVE WITH
GUNFIRE.



AND I'M NOT
ALIVE WITH
ANYTHING.





RAIN.



A close-up comic book panel of a man's face, tilted back. His eyes are closed, and there is a vertical cut on his forehead with blood dripping down. A hand with a bloody knife is positioned near his open mouth. The background is dark and textured.

EVERYBODY IN
MY CREW. ALL
THE PEOPLE I
COULD HAVE HAD
BACKING ME UP...

BUT I TOLD THEM,
"NAH. DON'T WORRY.
I DON'T NEED THE
WHOLE TEAM. TAKE
THE DAY OFF."

IT SEEMED SO
STRAIGHTFORWARD.
SO OPEN AND SHUT.

NOW THE ONLY THING
THAT MAY WIND UP
OPEN AND SHUT IS THE
LID ON MY COFFIN.

STAKE OUT



SURE DIDN'T SEEM LIKE THAT WHEN I FIRST CAME TO ADINA MALCOLM'S HOME.

OR, MORE CORRECTLY, HER SOON-TO-BE-FORMER HOME.



LOOK AT THIS! SHE'S GIVING ME UNTIL TOMORROW TO MOVE OUT! AND NO ONE IS DOING ANYTHING ABOUT IT!

WELL, TECHNICALLY, IT IS HER HOUSE.



ARE YOU TAKING HER SIDE?

IT'S MY JOB TO TAKE YOUR SIDE.



OKAY, SEE, THIS IS WHY I WAS HOPING MONET ST. CROIX WOULD BE HANDLING THIS PERSONALLY.

I WANT SOMEONE WHO'S TAKING MY SIDE BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE A GREAT INJUSTICE IS HAPPENING. NOT BECAUSE THEY'RE BEING PAID FOR IT.



MONET'S IN BEVERLY HILLS AT THE MOMENT...

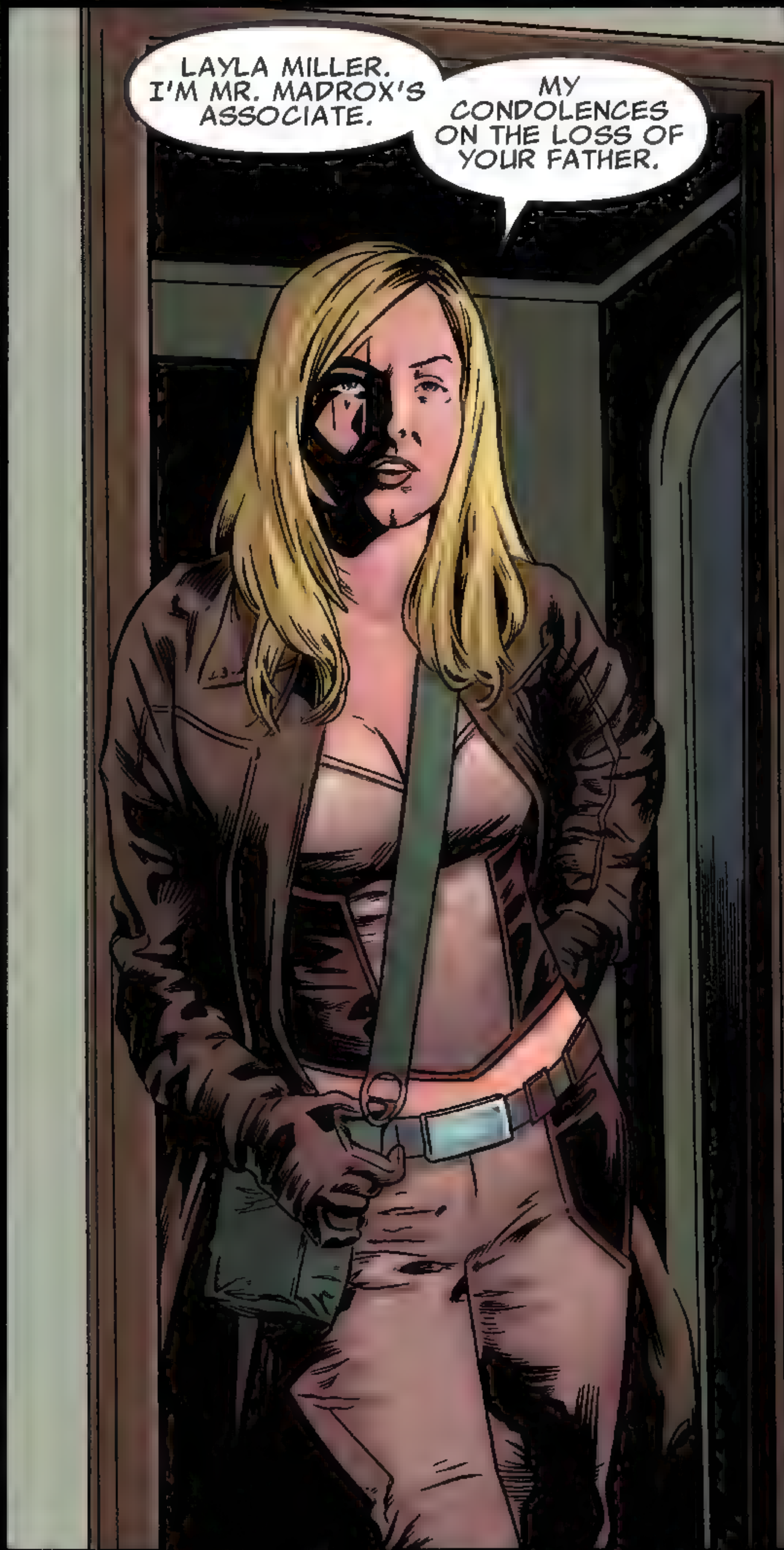
WHAT'S SHE DOING THERE?

BUYING IT. THE POINT IS--

ADINA... MAY I CALL YOU ADINA...?

I SUPPOSE, YOU ARE...?

WHAT THE HELL IS SHE DOING HERE? ALTHOUGH I GUESS NOTHING SHOULD SURPRISE ME WHERE SHE'S CONCERNED.



LAYLA MILLER.
I'M MR. MADROX'S
ASSOCIATE.

MY
CONDOLENCES
ON THE LOSS OF
YOUR FATHER.



THANK YOU,
LAYLA.

ARE YOU
IN CHARGE OF
X-FACTOR
INVESTIGATIONS?

NO--

YES,
I AM.



AND I ASSURE
YOU THAT YOU WILL
RECEIVE OUR FULL
SUPPORT.

ALL...ALL
RIGHT. THANK
YOU--



YOU HAVEN'T
BEEN SLEEPING
WELL, HAVE
YOU?

THAT OBVIOUS,
HUH? YEAH, I'VE BEEN
HAVING NIGHTMARES,
KEEPING ME AWAKE.
GUESS A DETECTIVE
JUST KNOWS
STUFF.

YOU
COULD SAY
THAT.

GOD KNOWS
SHE CERTAINLY
HAS ENOUGH
TIMES.

SO...



WHY DO
YOU THINK
YOUR STEPMOTHER
KILLED YOUR
FATHER?

ASIDE FROM
THE WHOLE
"STEMOTHERS
ARE EVIL"
TROPE.



SHE'S ALWAYS HATED ME, THAT'S WHY.

SHE THINKS I ONLY CARED ABOUT HER FATHER FOR HIS MONEY.



WITH ALL RESPECT, YOU ARE CONSIDERABLY YOUNGER THAN HE WAS.

THAT'S HARDLY A CRIME.

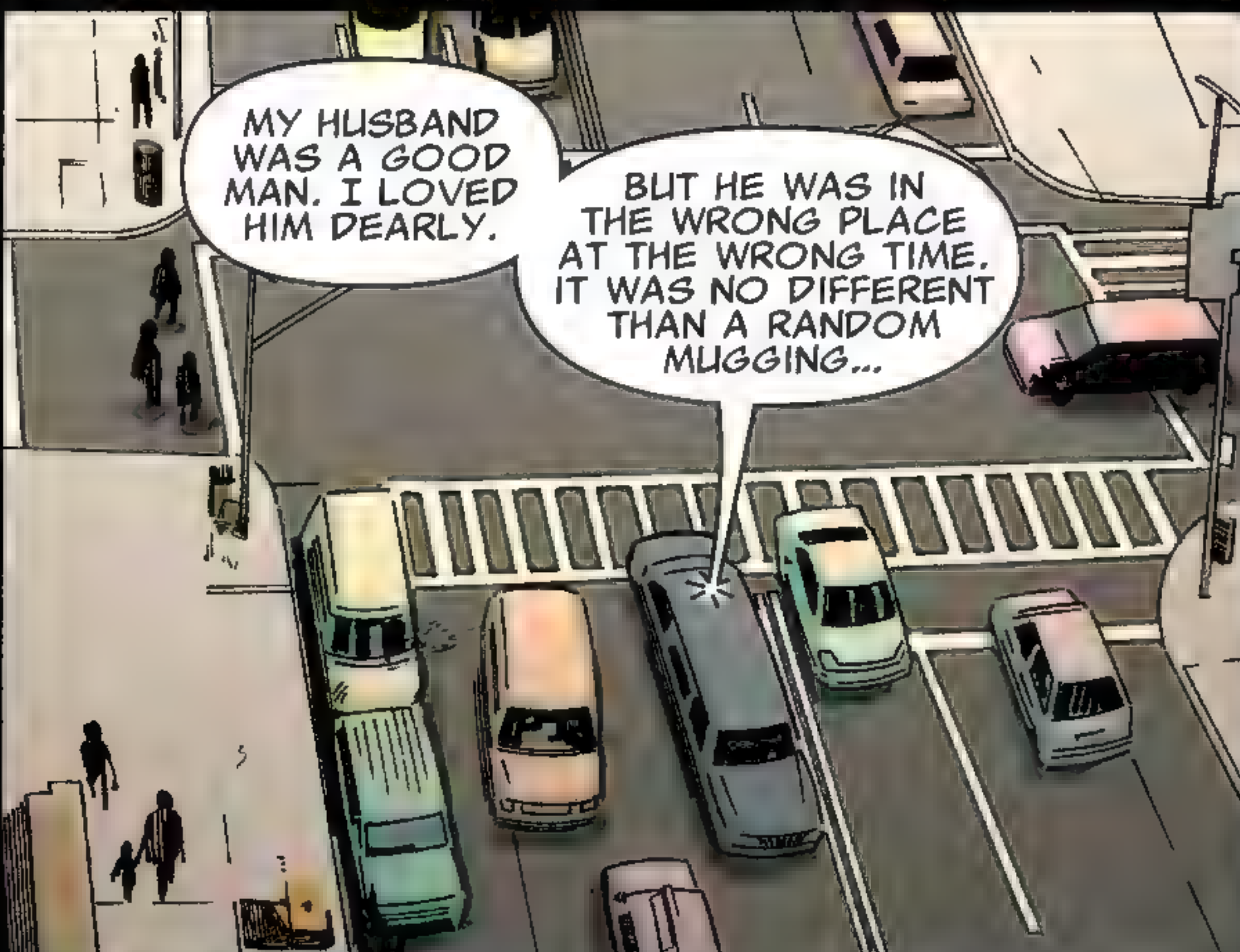
TRUE, BUT MURDERING SOMEONE IS.



AND THE POLICE ALREADY RULED ON WHO THE MURDERER WAS:

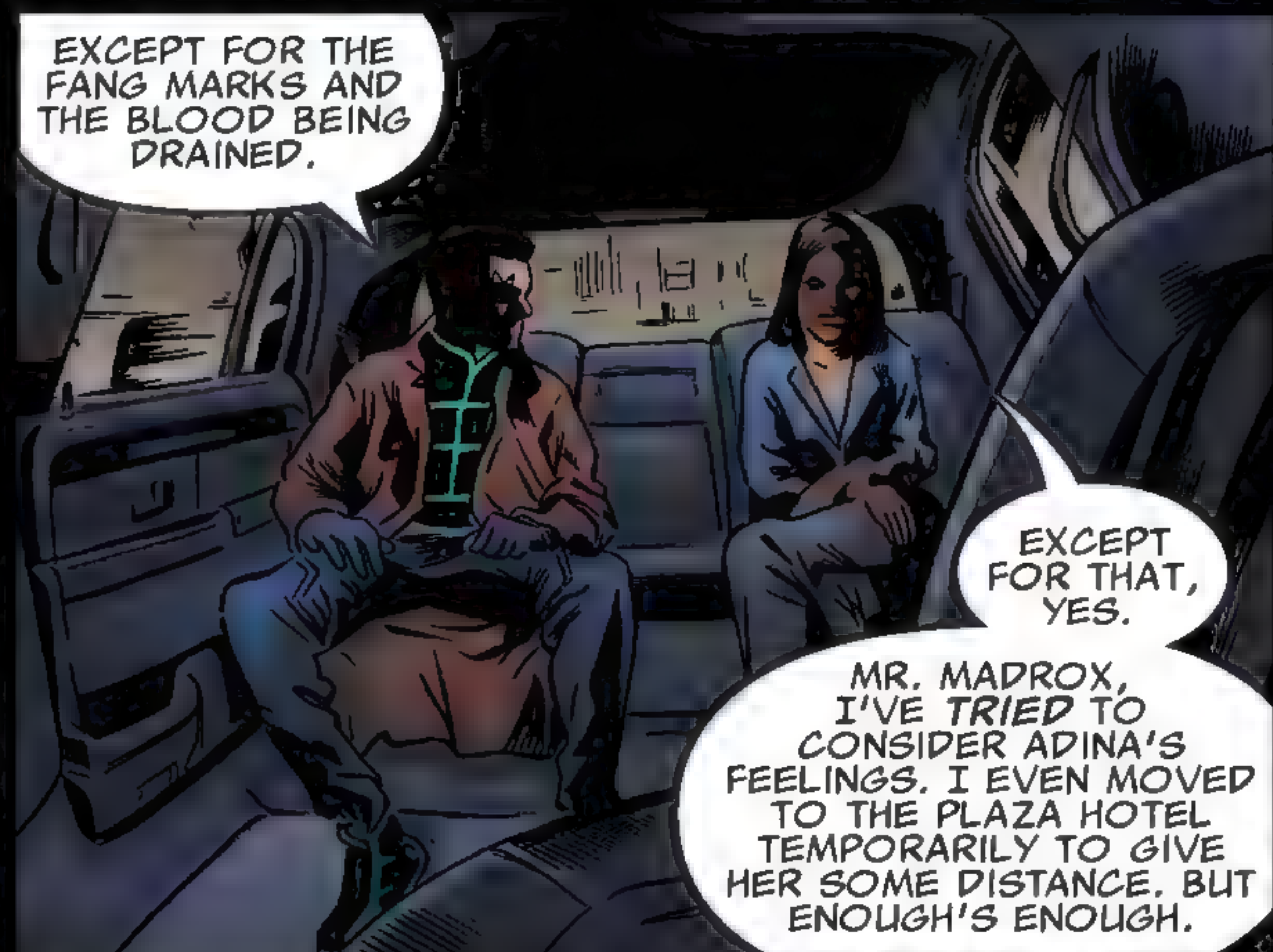
A VAMPIRE, DURING THAT ENTIRE BUSINESS WHEN THOSE...THOSE CREATURES WERE JUST EVERYWHERE.

I CHECKED UP ON YOU, AND I ASSUME IT'S THAT SUPERNATURAL ELEMENT THAT PROMPTED ADINA TO SEEK OUT YOUR SERVICES.



MY HUSBAND WAS A GOOD MAN. I LOVED HIM DEARLY.

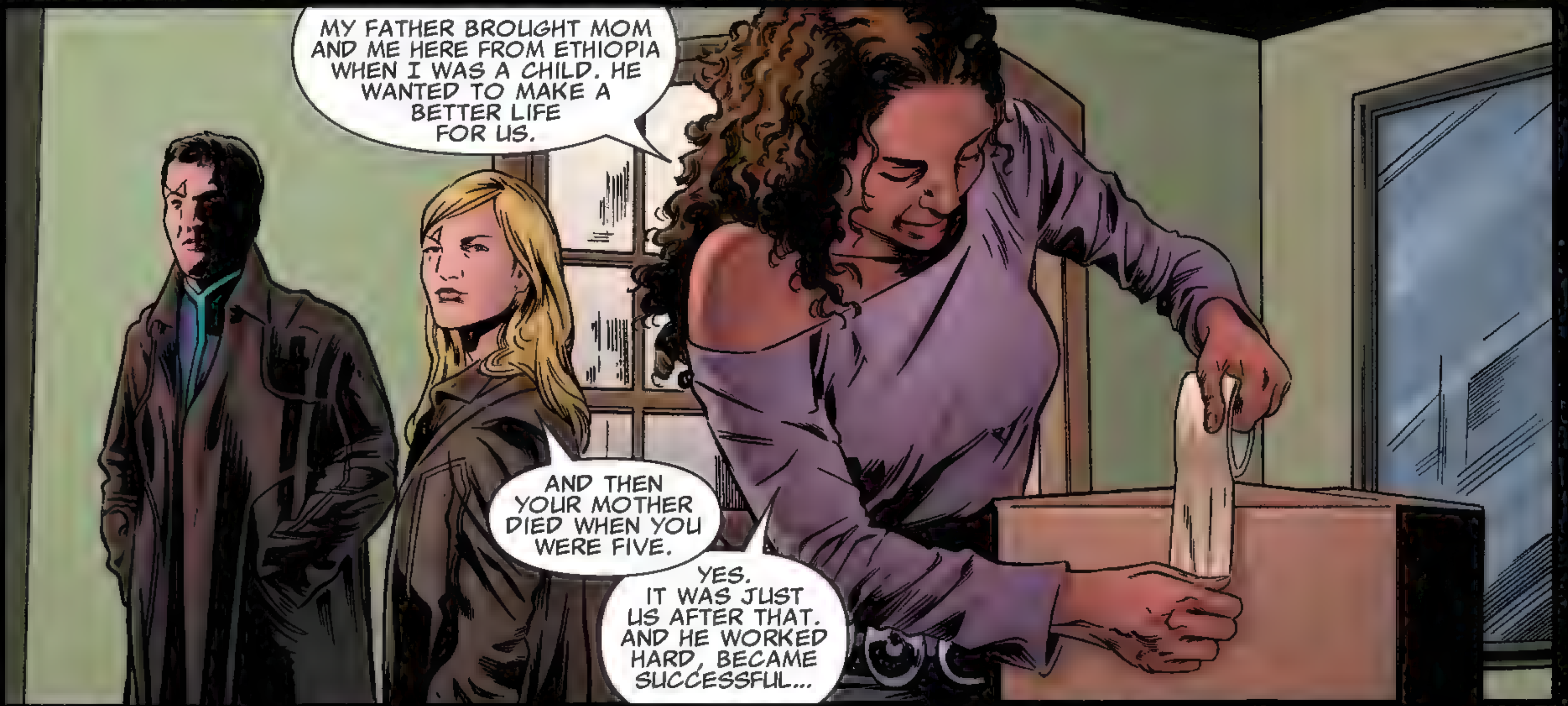
BUT HE WAS IN THE WRONG PLACE AT THE WRONG TIME. IT WAS NO DIFFERENT THAN A RANDOM MUGGING...



EXCEPT FOR THE FANG MARKS AND THE BLOOD BEING DRAINED.

EXCEPT FOR THAT, YES.

MR. MADROX, I'VE TRIED TO CONSIDER ADINA'S FEELINGS. I EVEN MOVED TO THE PLAZA HOTEL TEMPORARILY TO GIVE HER SOME DISTANCE. BUT ENOUGH'S ENOUGH.



MY FATHER BROUGHT MOM AND ME HERE FROM ETHIOPIA WHEN I WAS A CHILD. HE WANTED TO MAKE A BETTER LIFE FOR US.

AND THEN YOUR MOTHER DIED WHEN YOU WERE FIVE.

YES. IT WAS JUST US AFTER THAT. AND HE WORKED HARD, BECAME SUCCESSFUL...



AND THEN CARLA CAME ALONG.

THIS "VAMPIRE ATTACK"...IT'S SO APPROPRIATE, BECAUSE SHE'S NOTHING BUT A BLOODSUCKER.



I CONFRONTED HER, YOU KNOW. AT THE FUNERAL. HER WITH HER CROCODILE TEARS...

I TOLD HER I KNEW SHE WAS RESPONSIBLE SOMEHOW.

IT'S JUST... IT'S TOO CONVENIENT.



YOU MEAN THAT THEY WERE MARRIED LESS THAN A YEAR, THEN HE DIES AND SHE INHERITS--

EVERYTHING!

EXCEPT SHE'S LETTING YOU KEEP THE CONDO ON THE WEST SIDE.



WOULD YOU EXPLAIN TO HIM THAT--

THAT HER "LETTING" YOU KEEP SOMETHING THAT SHOULD RIGHTFULLY HAVE BEEN YOURS IS INSULTING?

EXACTLY.



WHAT SHE SAID.

"SHE"? YOU SAID IT.

SHE'S THE CLIENT. WE SPEAK FOR HER.



IN EXCHANGE
FOR MY TALKING
TO YOU SO FREELY,
MR. MADROX, I'D
APPRECIATE IF YOU
WOULD DO ME
A FAVOR IN
RESPONSE...

IF I
CAN.



I KNOW
ADINA SEES
ME AS AN
OUTSIDER.

SOMEONE
WHO DIDN'T
SHARE HER AND
HER FATHER'S
ROOTS.

AND
THERE'S
SOME TRUTH
TO THAT.



BUT
I'M NOT THE
ENEMY.

SHE HAS
NO REASON
TO RESENT
ME...



AND I THINK,
DEEP DOWN, SHE
UNDERSTANDS
THAT.

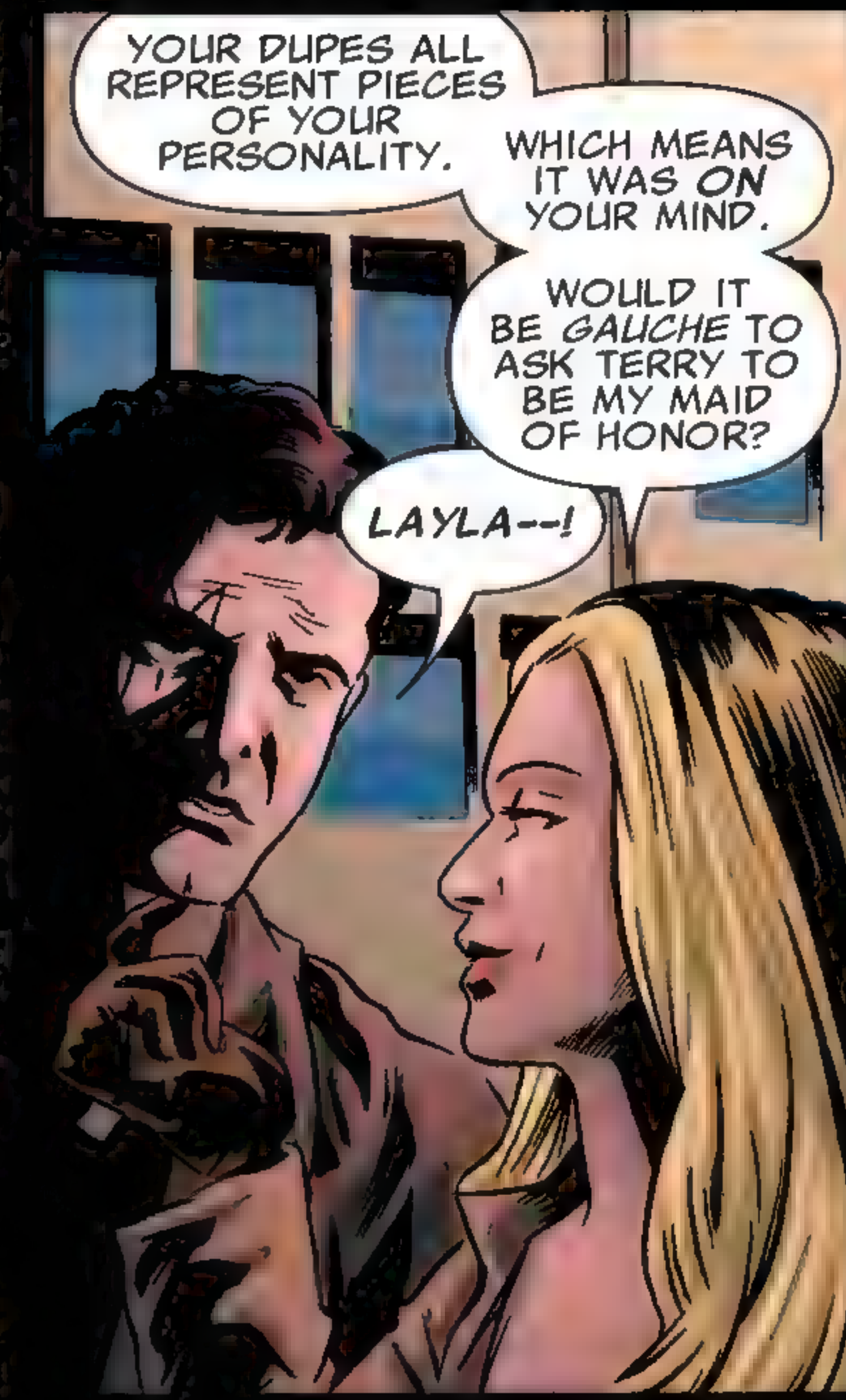
WOULD
YOU TELL
HER ALL THAT
FOR ME?

IF SHE'LL
LISTEN.

MAKE HER
LISTEN.

I BELIEVE
THIS IS YOUR
STOP.



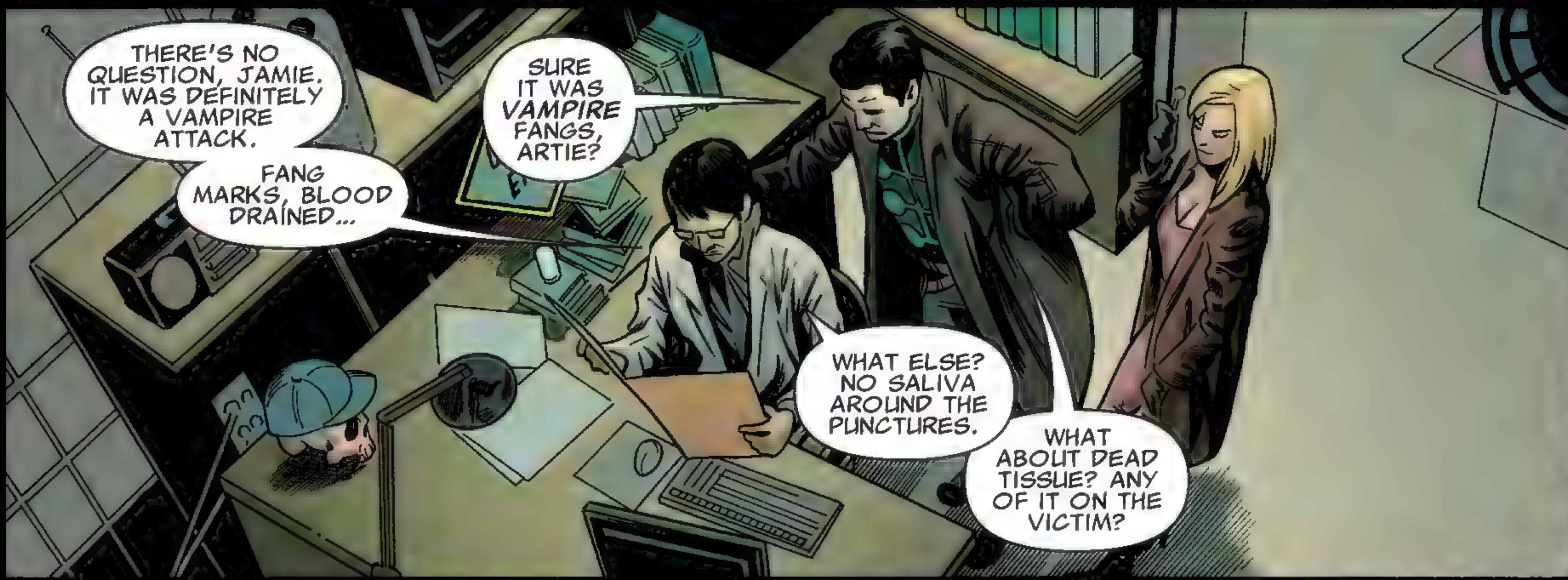




THEN AGAIN, I NEVER KNOW WHAT LAYLA'S DEAL IS, OR WHERE SHE'S COMING FROM.

THE ENTIRE TRIP OVER TO THE MORGUE, SHE KEEPS TALKING ABOUT BEING MY FIANCEE. SHE DOESN'T MEAN IT, THOUGH.

I THINK SHE DOESN'T MEAN IT.



THERE'S NO QUESTION, JAMIE. IT WAS DEFINITELY A VAMPIRE ATTACK.

FANG MARKS, BLOOD DRAINED...

SURE IT WAS VAMPIRE FANGS, ARTIE?

WHAT ELSE? NO SALIVA AROUND THE PUNCTURES.

WHAT ABOUT DEAD TISSUE? ANY OF IT ON THE VICTIM?



NONE, ACTUALLY, WHICH ADMITTEDLY IS STRANGE.

YOU'D THINK THERE'D BE SOME UNDER THE VIC'S FINGERNAILS OR SOMETHING. BUT NOTHING.



WHICH WOULD SEEM TO ARGUE AGAINST THERE BEING ANY HUMANS INVOLVED.

WHICH BRINGS US BACK TO A RANDOM VAMPIRE ATTACK.

MAYBE.



"MAYBE"?

UH-HUH.

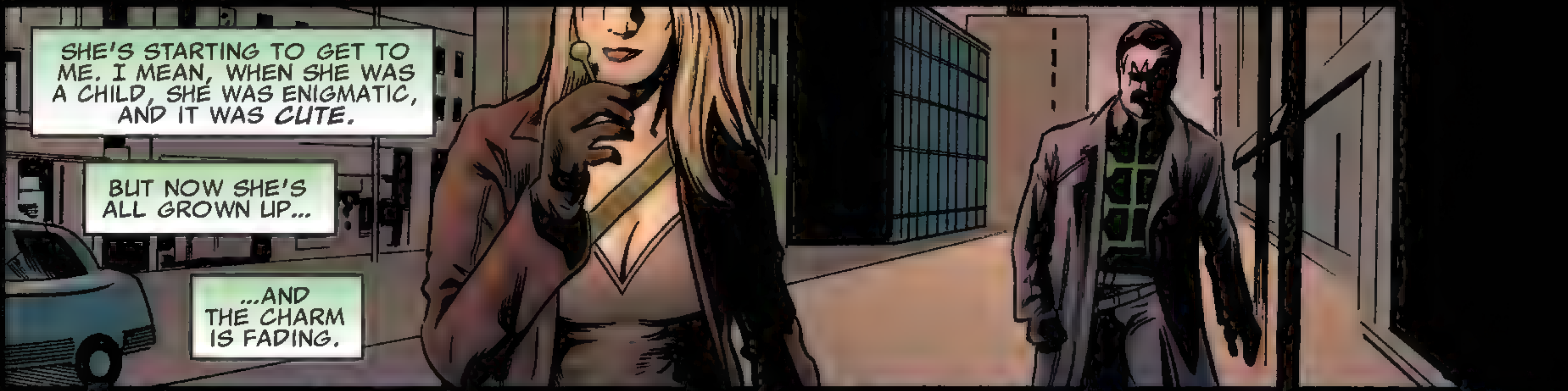
"MAYBE"?

YUP.

YOU'RE KILLIN' ME, LAYLA.



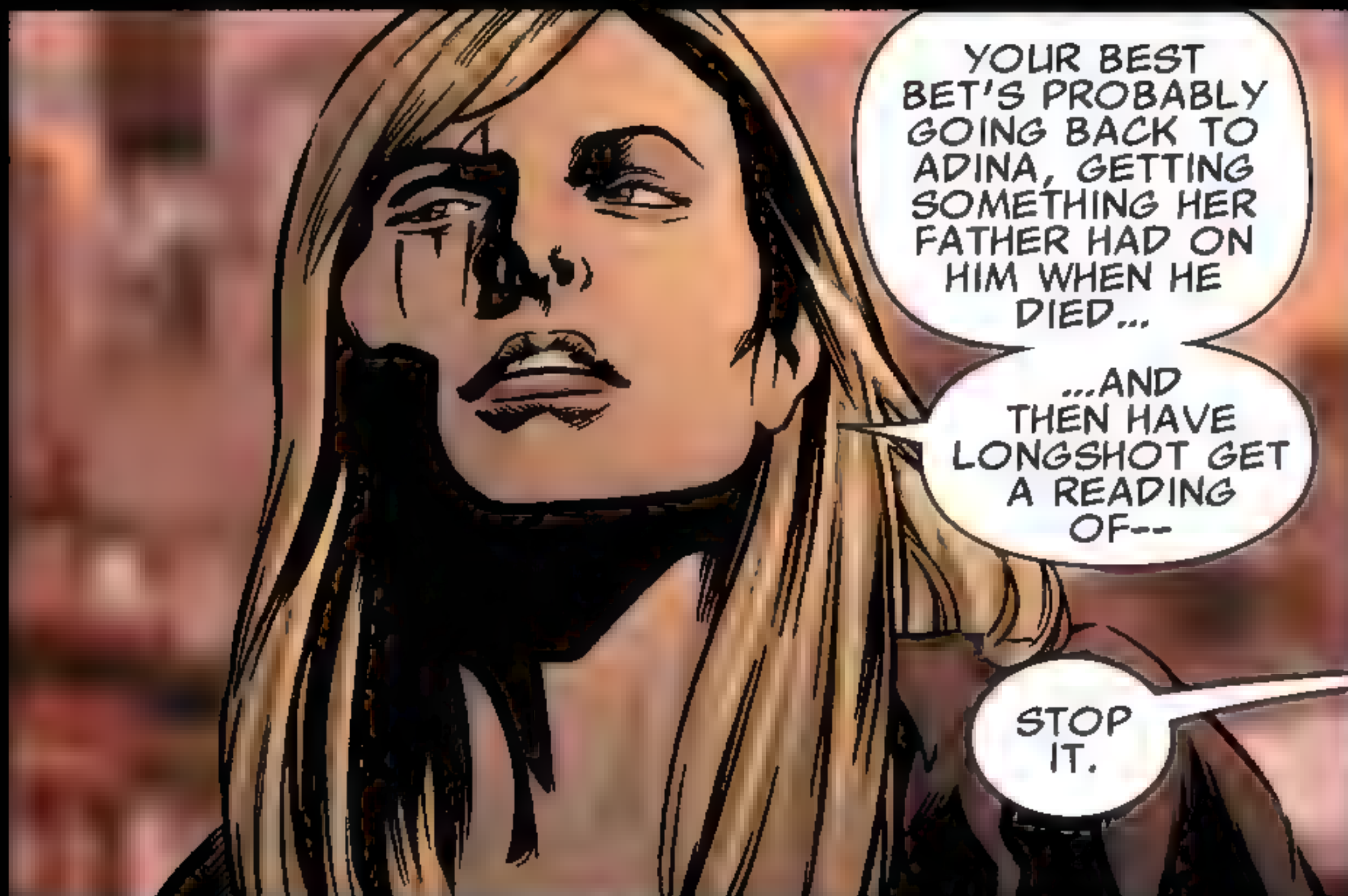
WELL, WE'RE IN THE RIGHT PLACE FOR IT.



SHE'S STARTING TO GET TO ME. I MEAN, WHEN SHE WAS A CHILD, SHE WAS ENIGMATIC, AND IT WAS CUTE.

BUT NOW SHE'S ALL GROWN UP...

...AND THE CHARM IS FADING.



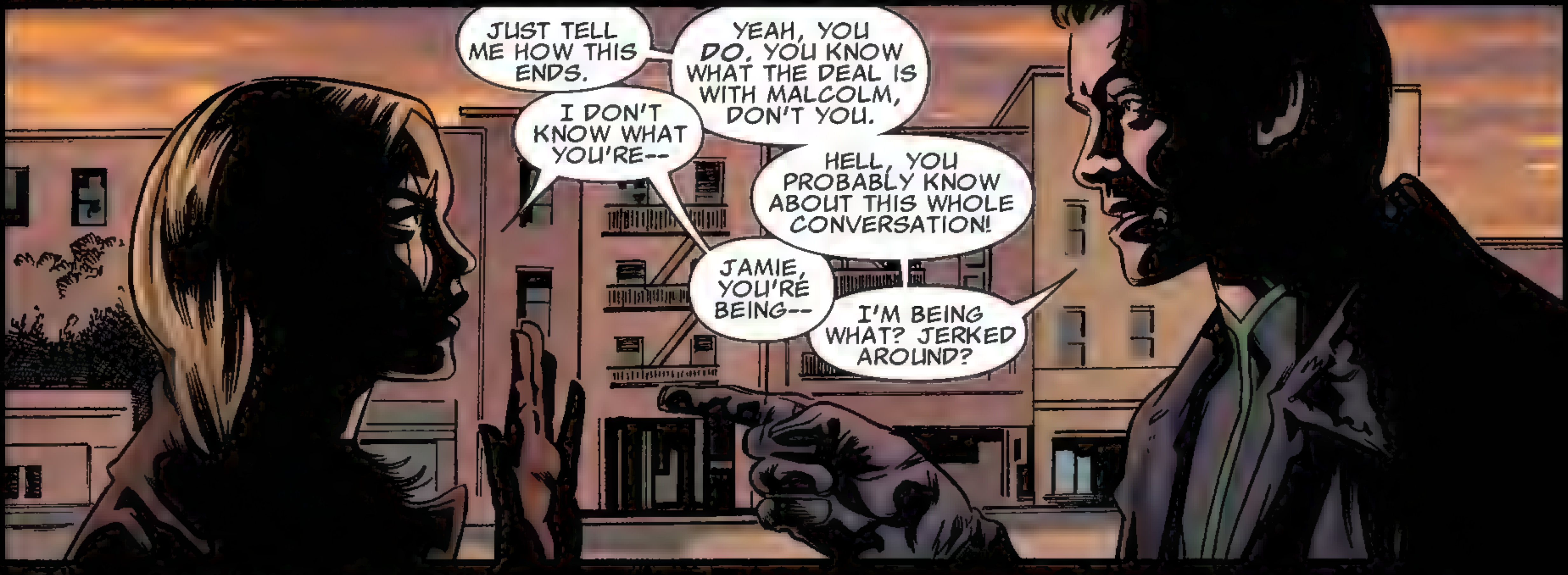
YOUR BEST BET'S PROBABLY GOING BACK TO ADINA, GETTING SOMETHING HER FATHER HAD ON HIM WHEN HE DIED...

...AND THEN HAVE LONGSHOT GET A READING OF--

STOP IT.



EXCUSE ME?



JUST TELL ME HOW THIS ENDS.

YEAH, YOU DO. YOU KNOW WHAT THE DEAL IS WITH MALCOLM, DON'T YOU.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE--

HELL, YOU PROBABLY KNOW ABOUT THIS WHOLE CONVERSATION!

JAMIE, YOU'RE BEING--

I'M BEING WHAT? JERKED AROUND?



YOU'RE HURTING ME!

AND HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE YOU HURTING, PLAYING GAMES INSTEAD OF JUST BEING STRAIGHT WITH US!



PLAYING GAMES IS FINE WHEN YOU'RE A KID!

BUT YOU'RE NOT A KID ANYMORE, AND PLAYTIME'S OVER!



PROBLEM
HERE, MISS?
THIS MAN
BOTHERING
YOU?

WHO SAYS THERE'S
NEVER A COP AROUND
WHEN YOU REALLY
DON'T WANT ONE?



AND LAYLA
SAYS COOLLY...

NO PROBLEM,
OFFICER.

I KIND OF
LIKE IT WHEN
MY FIANCE
GETS A LITTLE
ROUGH.



YEAH,
WHATEVER,
LADY.



SO NOW I
HAVE TO THANK
YOU FOR--?

NO.
YOU DON'T
HAVE TO.



BUT IF I
TELL YOU
EVERYTHING I
KNOW... THEN YOU
WOULD HAVE TO
DO CERTAIN THINGS,
AND THERE GOES
FREE WILL. DON'T
YOU GET THAT?



NO. NO,
OF COURSE
YOU DON'T.

FINE,
THEN. COME
ON.

WHERE
ARE WE
GOING?

"ON STAKEOUT.
IT'S WHAT
DETECTIVES DO."

SHOULD I
ASK YOU WHY
WE'RE SPYING
ON OUR
CLIENT?

I'D
RATHER YOU
DIDN'T.

IT'S
JUST...

JUST
WHAT?

IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE
THAT YOU KEEP ME IN THE
DARK HALF THE TIME
JUST BECAUSE OF SOME
PHILOSOPHICAL
POINT.

EVERYTHING
PEOPLE DO IS
PHILOSOPHICAL
POINTS, WHETHER
THEY ADMIT IT
OR NOT.

YOU USED
TO TRUST ME.
NOW YOU SOUND
LIKE MONET AND
RICKTOR.

CAN YOU BLAME ME?
YOU HUNG OUT WITH
DOCTOR DOOM, FOR
GOD'S SAKE.
WHY--?

BECAUSE HE
HAS KNOWLEDGE
ABOUT MYSTICISM
I'M GOING TO
NEED.

I'M SURPRISED
YOU DON'T KNOW
IT ALREADY.

I DIDN'T,
BUT I'M
GOING TO.

EVEN
WHEN YOU
ANSWER ME, I
DON'T KNOW WHAT
YOU'RE TALKING
ABOUT.





SOME SORT OF...FOG
OR SOMETHING, BUT
MORE SUBSTANTIAL...

...HOVERING
OVER HER...

NO...COMING
OUT OF HER...
WHAT...I DON'T...



OH MY
GOD.



WHAT THE
HELL---?

SHE'S
CLIMBING
UP TO THE
ROOF!

YOU
SAID THAT
ALREADY.
START THE
CAR.

YES, I
SEE. START
THE CAR.

WHERE
IS SHE
GO---?



HONEY?
START THE
DAMNED CAR,
WOULD YOU,
PLEASE?

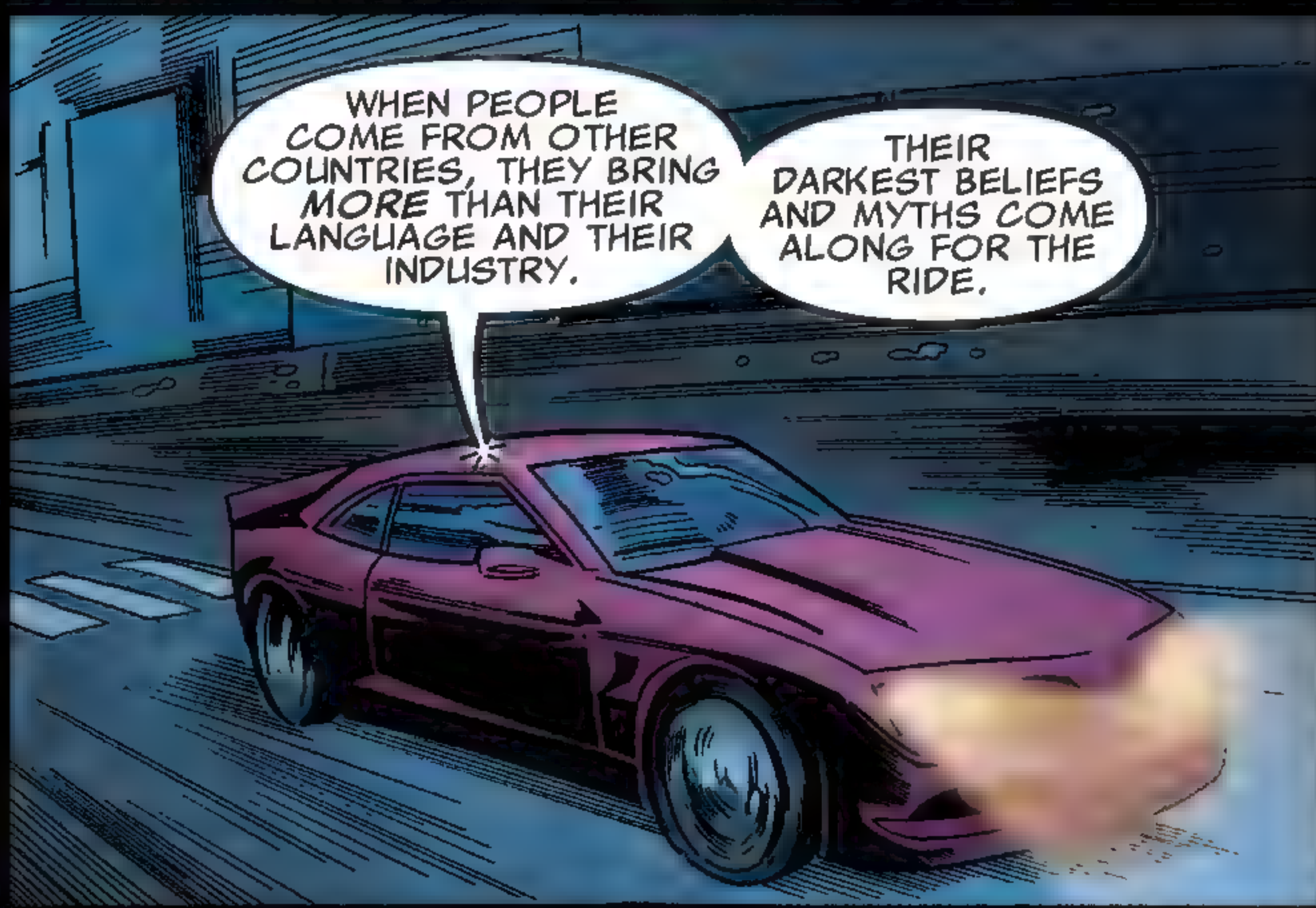
OWI OWI
OKAY!



I DRIVE AS FAST AS I CAN, FOLLOWING ADINA. FORTUNATELY IT'S THREE IN THE MORNING; THE STREETS ARE RELATIVELY EMPTY.

BUT I DON'T GET IT. I SAW HER IN DAYLIGHT. SHE'S NO VAMPIRE. SO WHAT AM I SEEING NOW?

AND AS IF READING MY MIND--WHICH, FOR ALL I KNOW, SHE IS-- LAYLA ANSWERS...



WHEN PEOPLE COME FROM OTHER COUNTRIES, THEY BRING MORE THAN THEIR LANGUAGE AND THEIR INDUSTRY.

THEIR DARKEST BELIEFS AND MYTHS COME ALONG FOR THE RIDE.



I...I DON'T...

ADINA'S FROM ETHIOPIA. HER DREAMS WERE HAUNTED. HER FATHER DIED OF A VAMPIRE BITE.

STILL NOT GETTING IT.



IT'S A VANDELLA.

THE GIRL GROUP THAT SANG WITH MARTHA...?

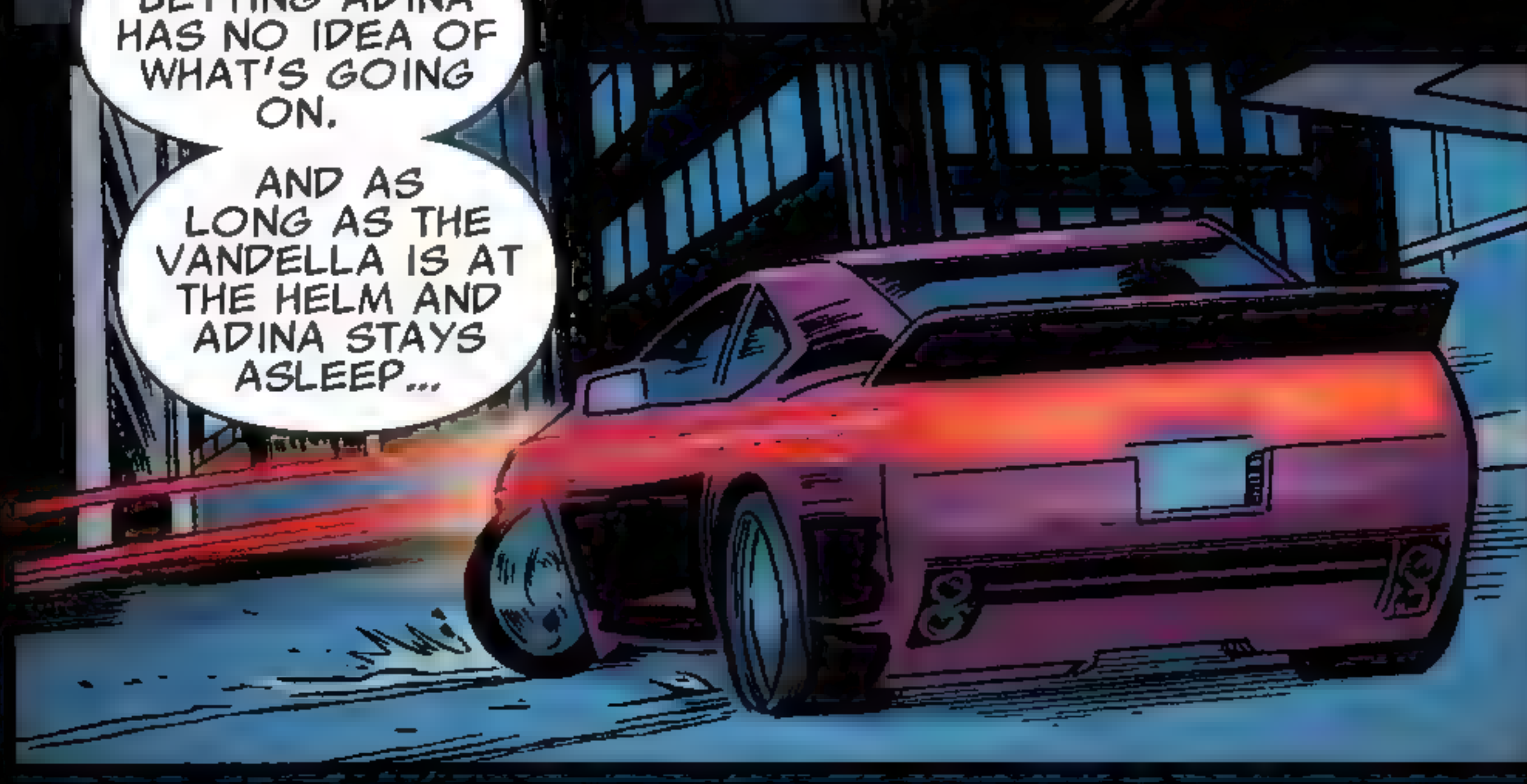
NO, DUMMY. A NORTH AFRICAN DREAM STALKER. A VAMPIRIC DEMON SPIRIT, LIKE A SUCCUBUS.

AND IT'S...WHAT? POSSESSING HER?



YEAH, I'M BETTING ADINA HAS NO IDEA OF WHAT'S GOING ON.

AND AS LONG AS THE VANDELLA IS AT THE HELM AND ADINA STAYS ASLEEP...



"...SHE'S BASICALLY
UNKILLABLE."



I SHOULD
HAVE TAKEN
YOU FIRST.

HMMM...?
WH-WHA--?



WHO'S
THERE?!
WHO--



BUT SHE WAS
SO ANGRY AT HIM
FOR BETRAYING
EVERYTHING...THEIR
ROOTS, THEIR
DREAMS...

...AND
HER DREAMING
MIND CRIED OUT
TO ME IN THE
NIGHT.

HOW COULD
I NOT ANSWER
THE CALL?

MY
GOD!

NO.
HER GOD.



BUT
YOU'LL BE WITH
YOURS SOON
ENOUGH!





DO I LOOK LIKE SOMEONE WHO IS THREATENED BY THE CHRISTIAN GOD?

SO MUCH FOR THAT PLAN.



IDIOT! YOU UNDERSTAND NOTHING!

ARRRRHHH!



I...I UNDERSTAND YOU'VE GOT SOME ~~2LHH~~ SERIOUS DADDY ISSUES...

HE INSULTED THE MEMORY OF HER MOTHER! HE INSULTED THE MEMORY OF WHO WE ARE!

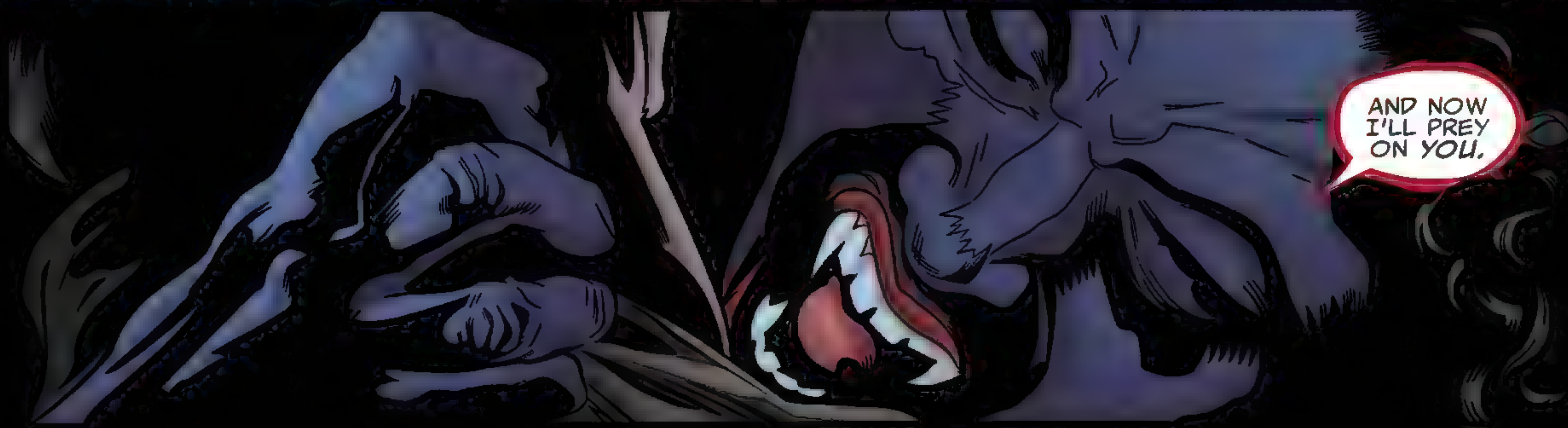
SHE WANTED HIM TO PAY, AND I HELPED--!



SHE LOVED HIM! SHE DIDN'T WANT HIM TO DIE, MUCH LESS... HAVE ANY HAND IN IT!

THIS IS ALL ABOUT YOU, YOU...PARASITE! YOU JUST...EXIST TO KILL...AND LOOK FOR WAYS TO DO IT...!

YOU DIDN'T HELP HER! YOU PREYED ON HER!



AND NOW I'LL PREY ON YOU.



AND THAT'S
WHEN I HEAR
THE WORDS.



IT'S LAYLA, MUTTERING
THINGS I DON'T UNDERSTAND.
IT'S SOME SORT OF...I DON'T
KNOW...INCANTATION.

SHE'S NOT THROWING BOLTS
OF MYSTIC ENERGY AROUND LIKE
DOC STRANGE OR ANYTHING...

...BUT WHATEVER
SHE'S SAYING...



IT APPEARS
TO BE
WORKING.

I CAN BARELY MAKE IT OUT. I HAVE A GLIMPSE OF THE CREATURE IN ITS PUREST FORM, SOMETHING ONLY *HINTED* AT WHEN IT WAS POSSESSING ADINA...

AND THEN THE AIR ERUPTS IN A NOISELESS EXPLOSION. HEAT WASHES OVER ME AND CHILLS ME AT THE SAME TIME.

AND WHEN IT'S OVER...

SHE'LL BE ALL RIGHT. AND SHE WON'T REMEMBER ANY OF IT, WHICH IS PROBABLY BEST.

I HAD TO WAIT FOR IT TO MANIFEST AND THEN BE CLOSE ENOUGH FOR IT TO HEAR THE EXORCISM.

YOU... EXORCISED HER--?

FOR GOOD, WITH ANY LUCK. DOOM TAUGHT ME HOW.

ONE OF THOSE THINGS I KNEW I'D NEED TO KNOW.

I FIGURED, WHY WAKE UP THE TEAM WHEN I HAD IT IN HAND?

I THINK I'LL WALK HOME, IF THAT'S OKAY. SEEMS A NICE NIGHT FOR IT.



LAYLA...

YEAH?

WANNA GET MARRIED?



A TOTALLY IMPULSIVE QUESTION FROM THE GUY WHO HAS TROUBLE DECIDING.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT... POSSESSED ME.

STILL, THE QUESTION HANGS THERE, AND THEN...



I DON'T KNOW. ASK ME LATER.



I'M AWASH WITH RELIEF, AND YET...

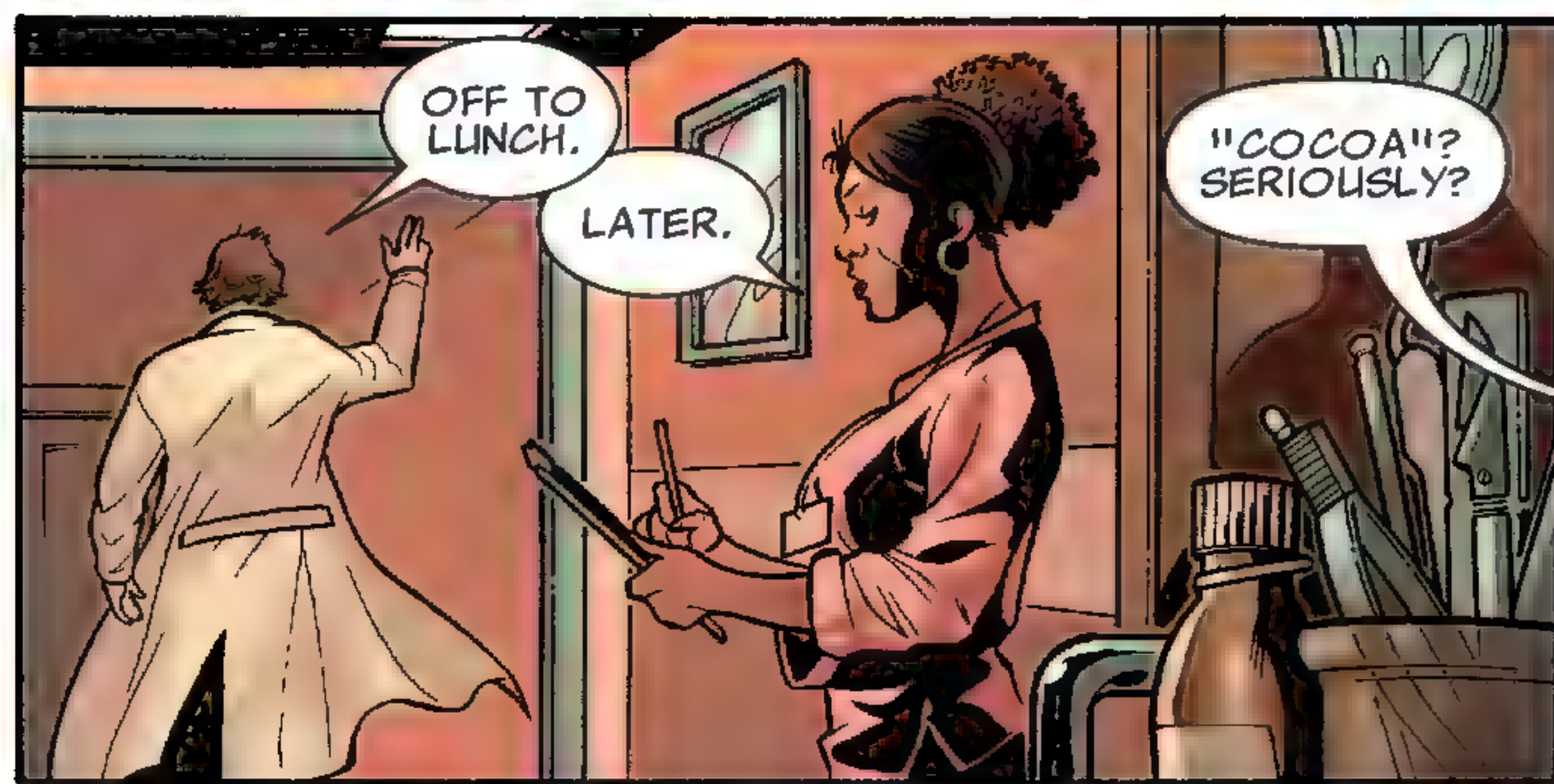
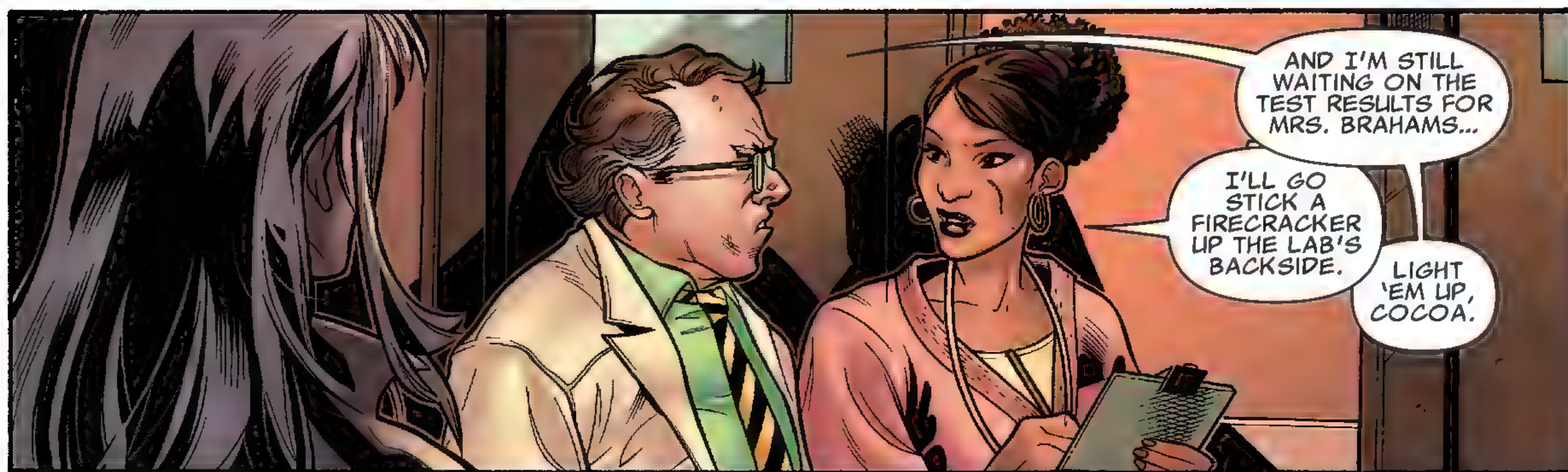
YOU DON'T KNOW? HOW CAN YOU NOT KNOW?



BECAUSE I'M LAYLA MILLER.

AND I DON'T KNOW STUFF.







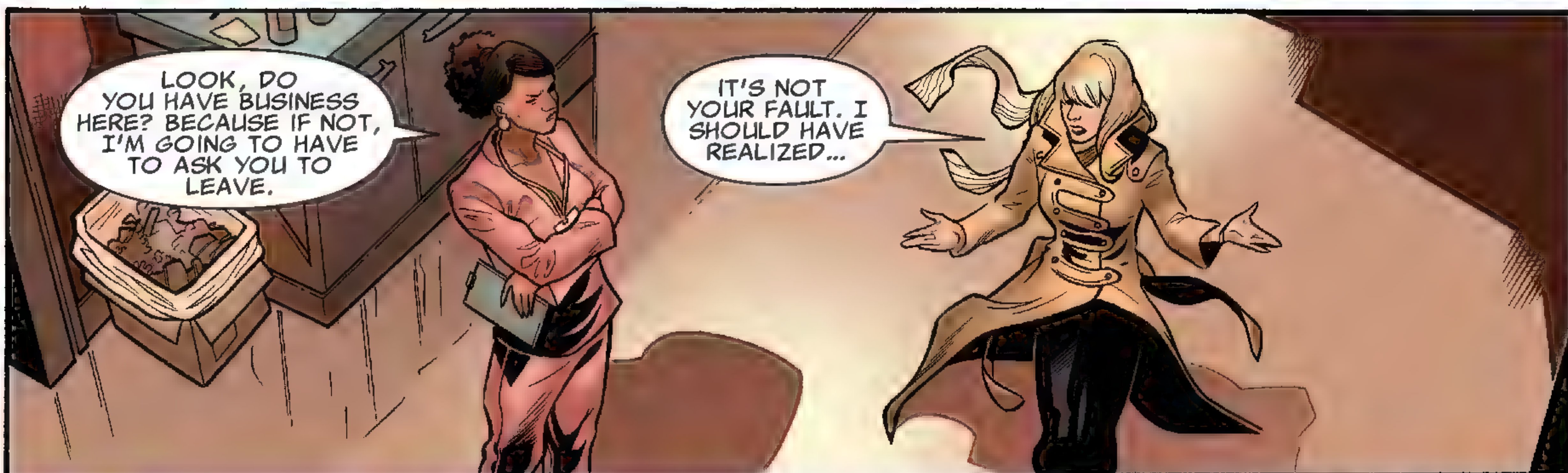
I TRIED CALLING YOU "COCO" ONCE. YOU NEARLY TOOK MY HEAD OFF.

I'M SORRY, HAVE WE MET...?



YOU DON'T REMEMBER.

DAMMIT.



LOOK, DO YOU HAVE BUSINESS HERE? BECAUSE IF NOT, I'M GOING TO HAVE TO ASK YOU TO LEAVE.

IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT. I SHOULD HAVE REALIZED...



DO I HAVE TO CALL SECURITY?

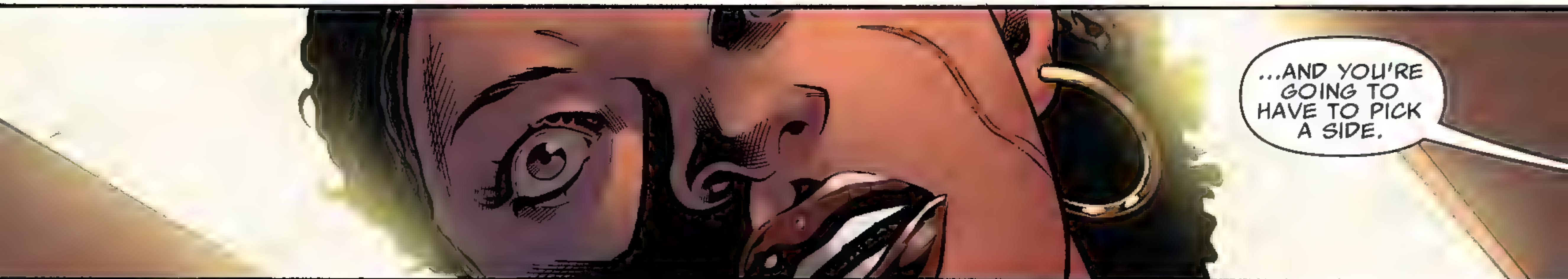


OH, HONEY, I WOULD DEARLY LOVE TO SEE YOU TRY.

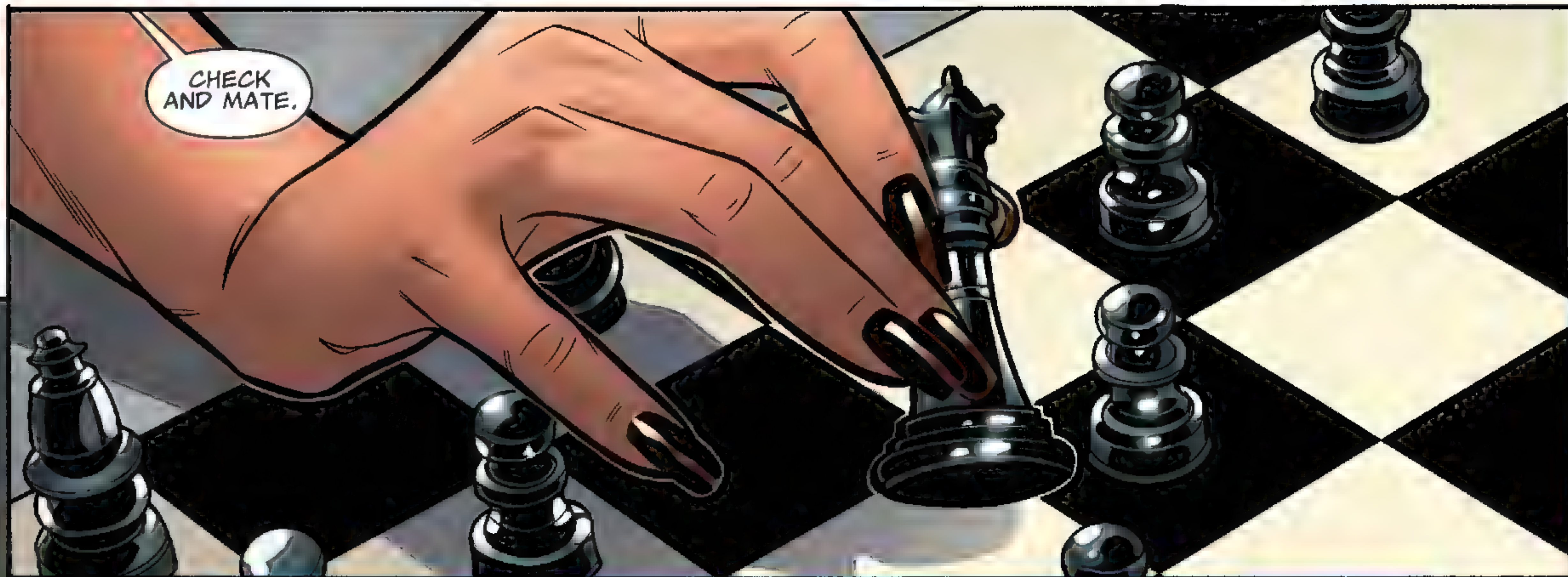


DON'T SWEAT IT. I'LL BE ON MY WAY.

BUT JUST SO YOU KNOW: THINGS ARE ABOUT TO HEAT UP FOR YOU...



...AND YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO PICK A SIDE.



CHECK AND MATE.

NEW YORK.
X-FACTOR HQ.



DAMNATION, YOU'RE GOOD, MONET.

NO, YOU'RE GOOD. I'M JUST THE BEST.

ANOTHER ROUND? PERHAPS YOU PLAY WHITE THIS TIME?

I ALWAYS PLAY BLACK. I'D RATHER AVOID THE WHITE QUEEN.



I WOULD HAVE THOUGHT MY STRATEGIC MIND WOULD GIVE ME THE EDGE, BUT APPARENTLY NOT.

PERHAPS I WAS DISTRACTED BY YOUR BREASTS.



OH, RICTOR WOULD JUST LOVE TO HEAR YOU SAY THAT.

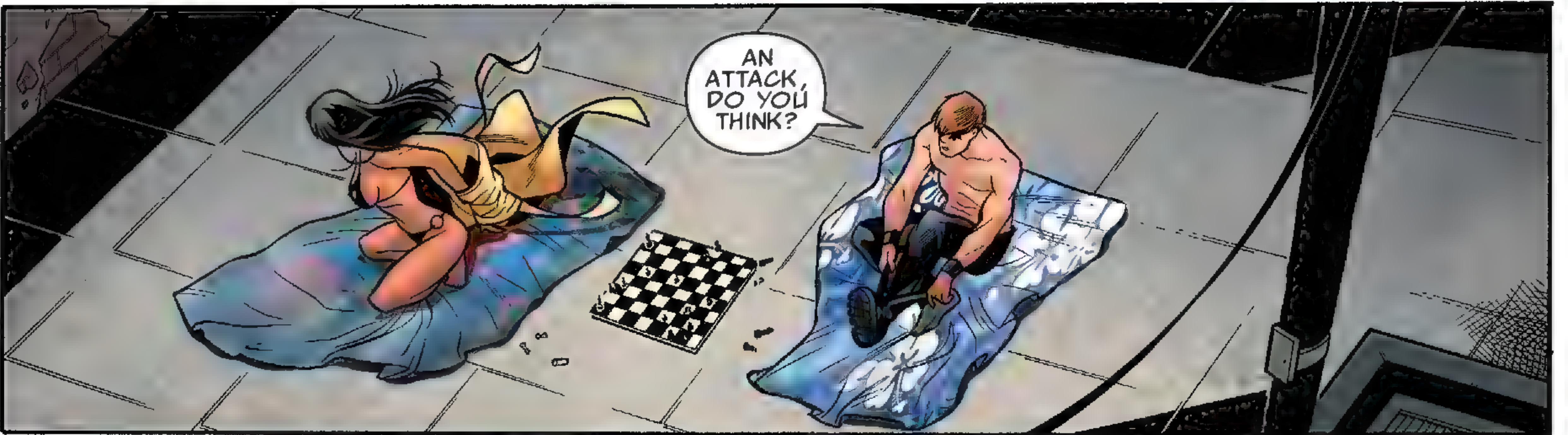
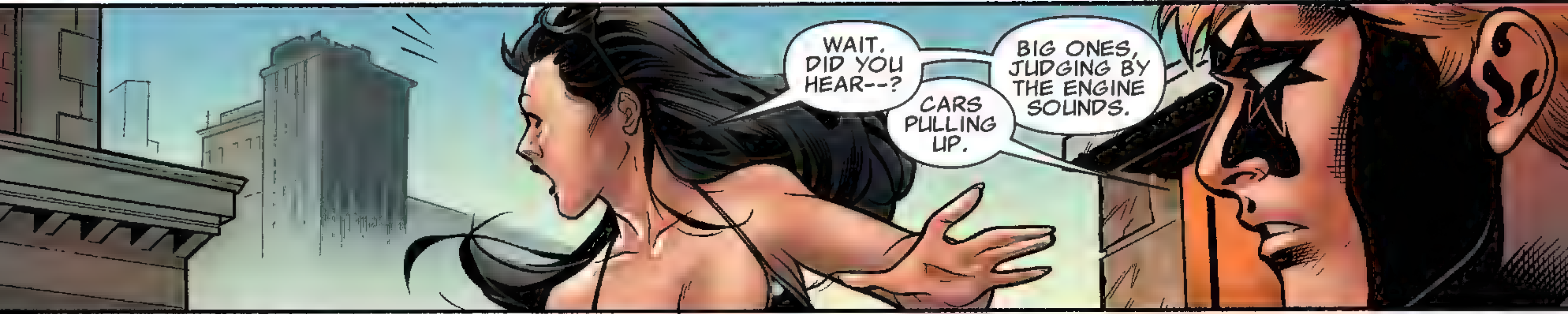
WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH YOU TWO THESE DAYS, ANYWAY?

RAHNE HAS BEEN A... DISTRACTION FOR HIM.

DON'T TELL ME THEY'RE--?

INTIMATE? NO. BUT THEY DO HAVE HISTORY, AND THE EMOTIONS THAT STIRS UP HAVE TO BE RESPECTED.







WHAT'CHA
UP TO, PIP?
LOOKIN' FOR
PORN?

REALLY?

BETTER.
I'M ON A
WEBSITE TALKIN'
ABOUT COMIC
BOOKS.

YEAH. RIGHT
NOW I'M GIVIN'
A GUY WHO
WRITES 'EM A
HARD TIME, JUST
FER KICKS.

SO
BASICALLY
YOU'RE
ACTING LIKE
A TROLL.



YEAH, THAT
JOKE JUST
NEVER GETS
OLD.



CHECKING
THE OFFICE.

HUH?



EVERYTHING
SEEMS CLEAR.

FRONT
OFFICE IS
SECURED. KEEP
HIS HONOR OUT
OF HERE UNTIL WE
HAVE A CHANCE
TO CHECK THE
ENTIRE--



ONE SIDE,
MULRONEY.

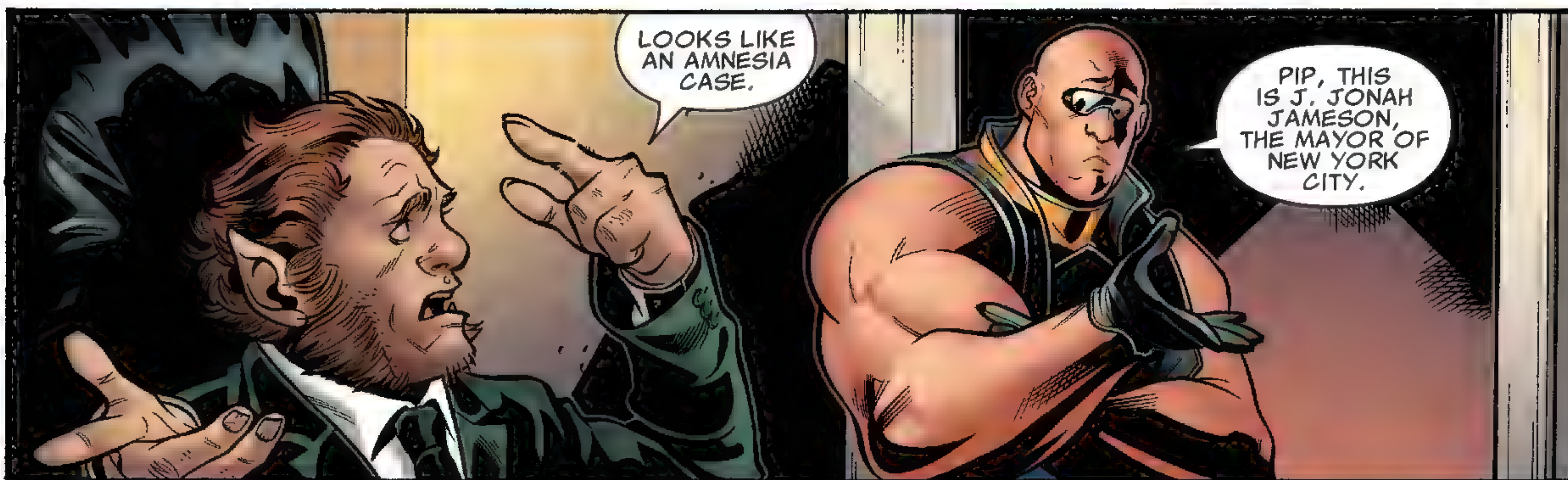
I KNOW
YOU'RE DOING
YOUR JOB, BUT
I DON'T HAVE
ALL DAY.



GET
MADROX.
NOW.

YEAH?
WHO'S HERE
T'SEE 'IM?

WHO'S
HERE TO--?
DO YOU KNOW
WHO I AM?



LOOKS LIKE
AN AMNESIA
CASE.

PIP, THIS
IS J. JONAH
JAMESON,
THE MAYOR OF
NEW YORK
CITY.



WELL,
THAT WAS
A SNAP.

MYSTERY
SOLVED. YOU
WANT US TO
BILL YA OR DO
YA WANNA
SETTLE UP
RIGHT NOW?



SO...ANYTHING ELSE YOU'RE NOT TELLING US, RAHNE?

A TON, JAMIE. BUT NOTHING YE NEED T'KNOW REGARDING MUH CONDITION.

IF YOU'RE HOPING TO FIND OUT WHAT THE HELL SHE WAS UP TO AFTER SHE LEFT US, MADROX, GOOD LUCK WITH THAT.

SHE HASN'T TOLD ME *SQUAT*, AND I'M THE FAKE FATHER OF HER BABY.



YE'RE JUST GONNA KEEP THROWIN' THAT IN MUH FACE, AREN'T YE.

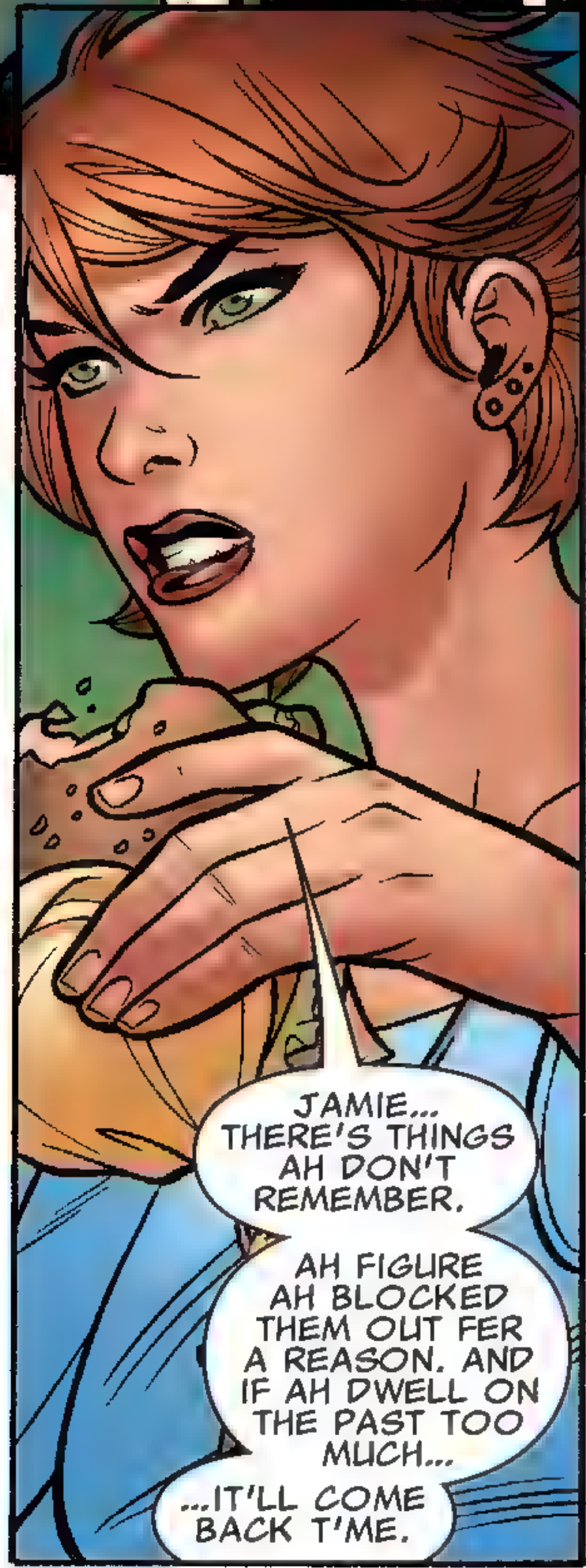
THAT'S THE PLAN FOR THE TIME BEING.



RAHNE... WE'RE YOUR FRIENDS. IF YOU CAN'T TRUST US...

AH TRUST YE, JAMIE. AH DO. BUT...

BUT WHAT...?



JAMIE... THERE'S THINGS AH DON'T REMEMBER.

AH FIGURE AH BLOCKED THEM OUT FER A REASON. AND IF AH DWELL ON THE PAST TOO MUCH...

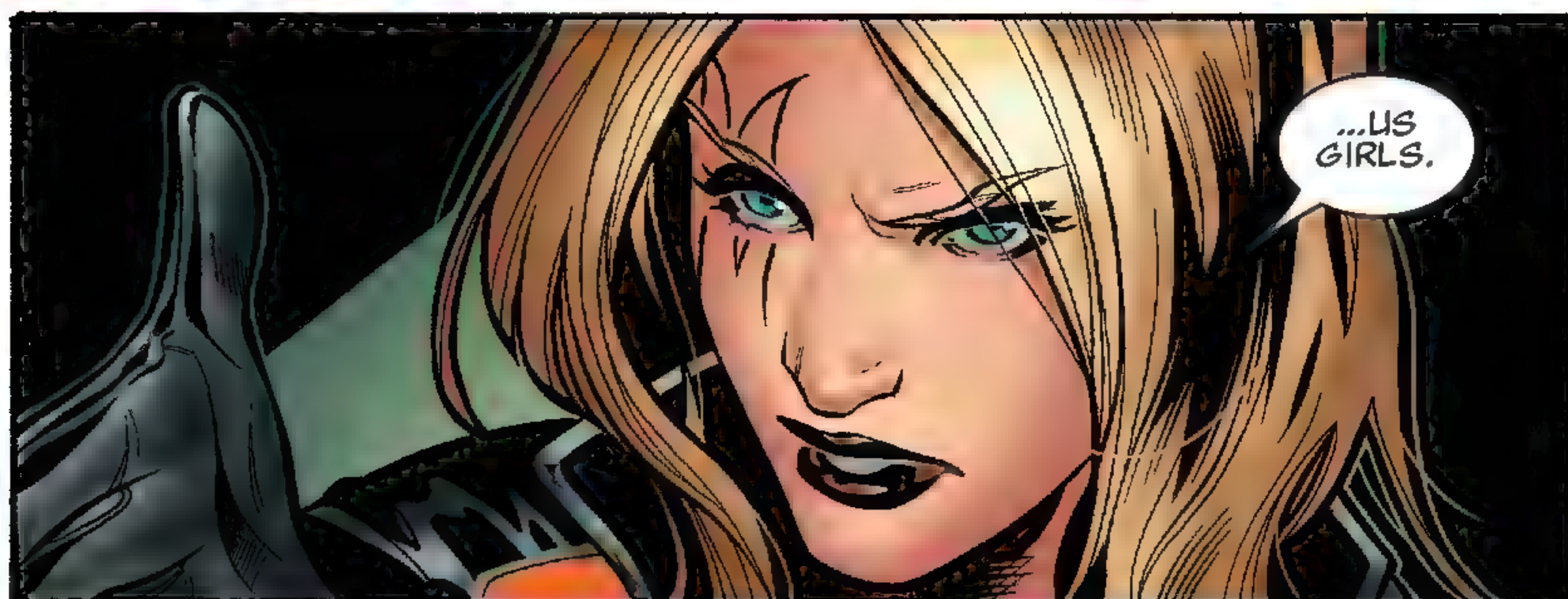
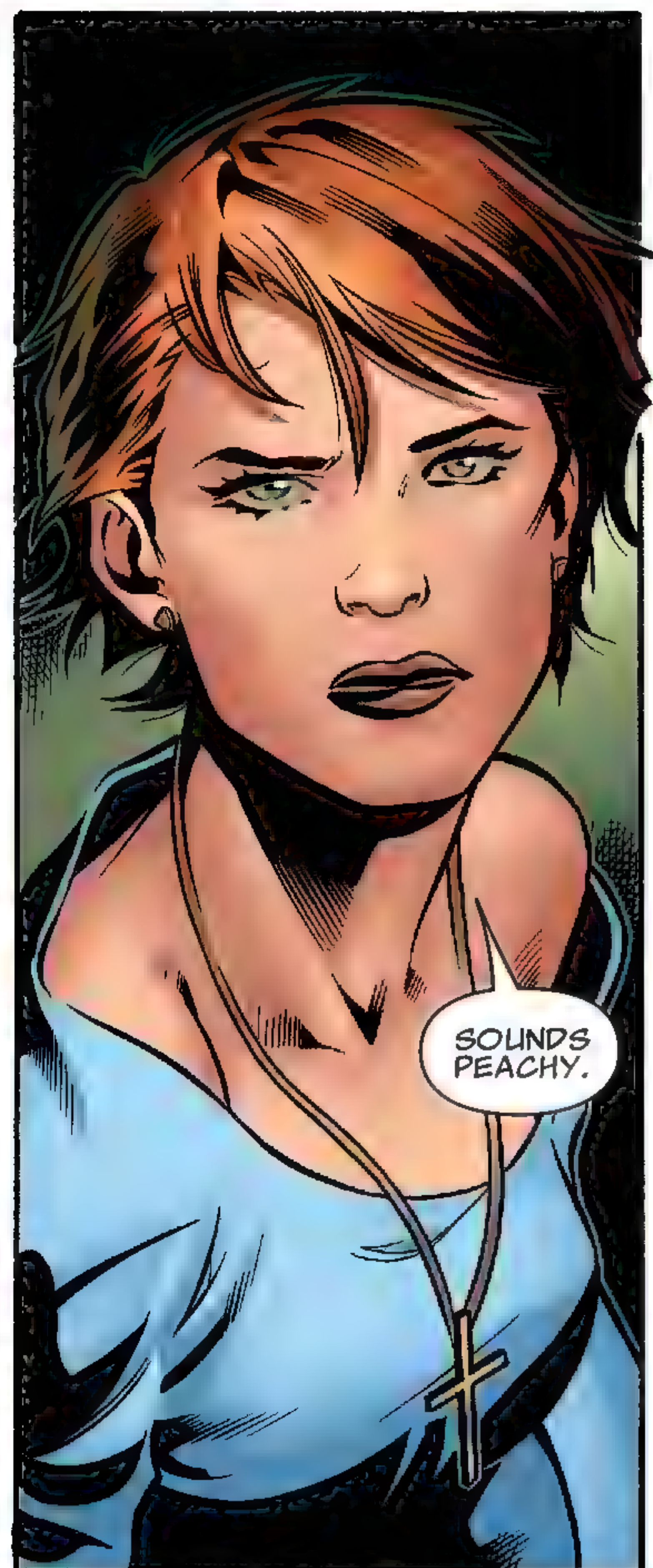
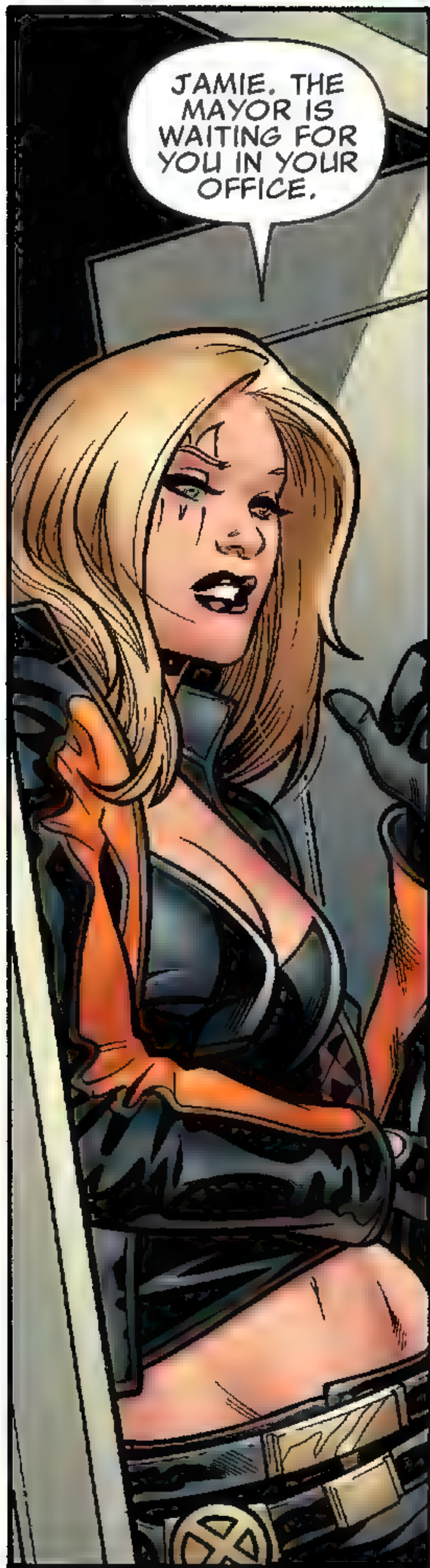
...IT'LL COME BACK T'ME.

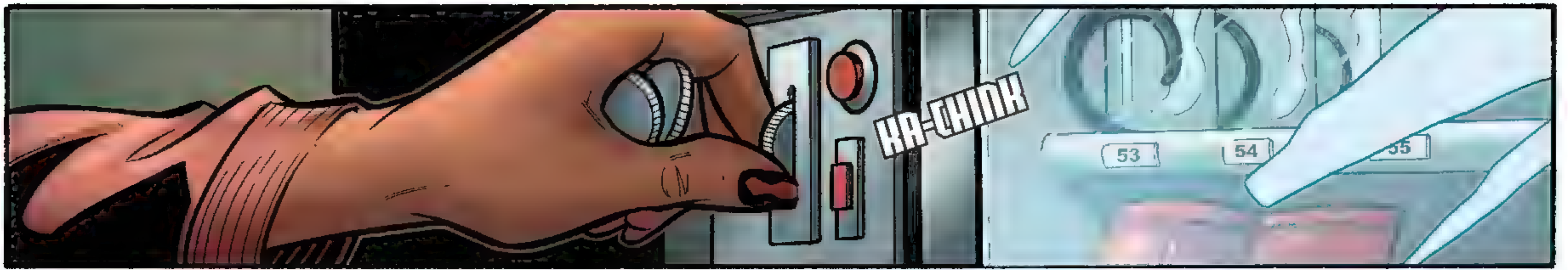


AND THAT WOULD BE BAD?

OOOOKAY.

VERRUH BAD, AH THINK.

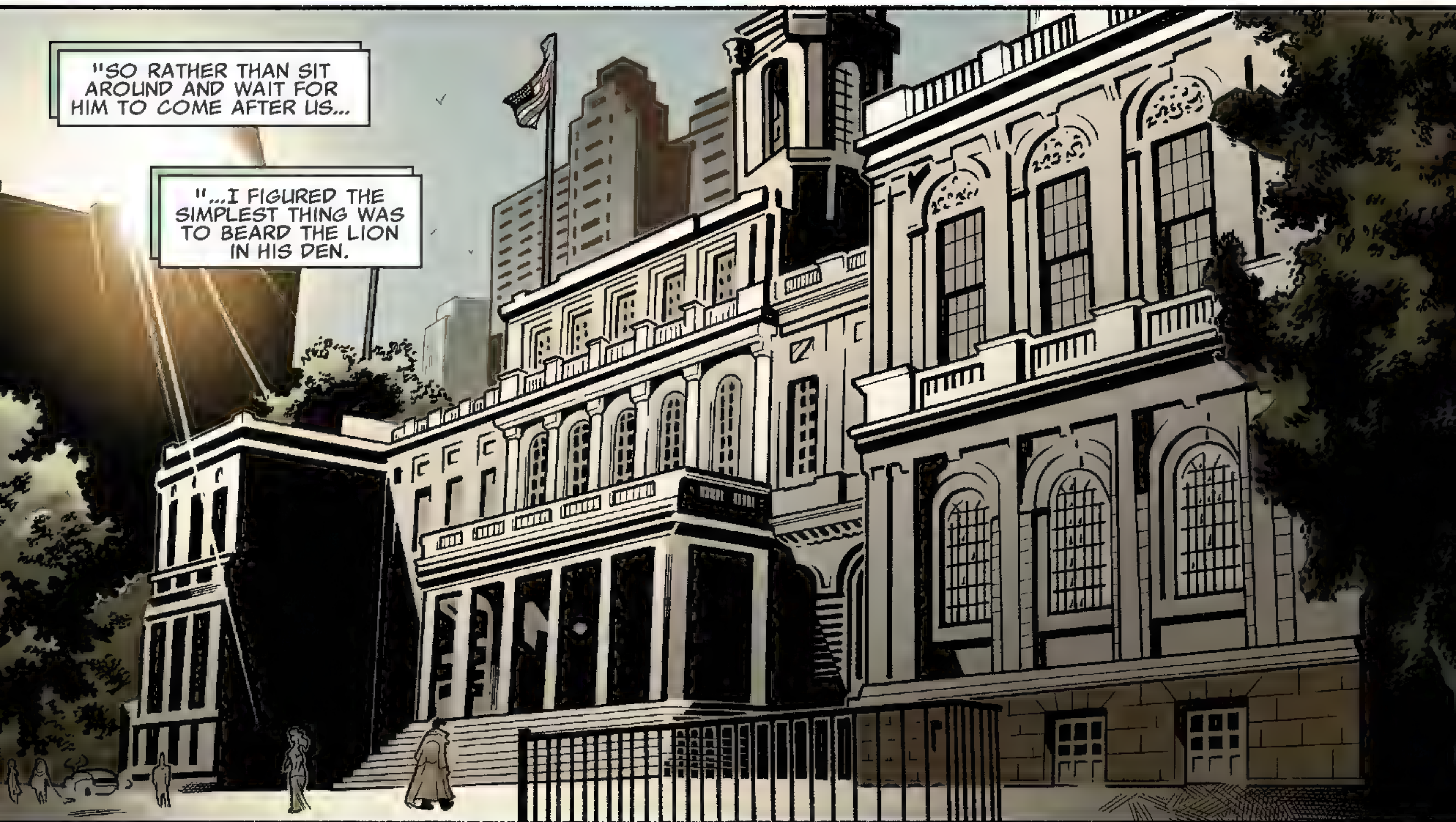
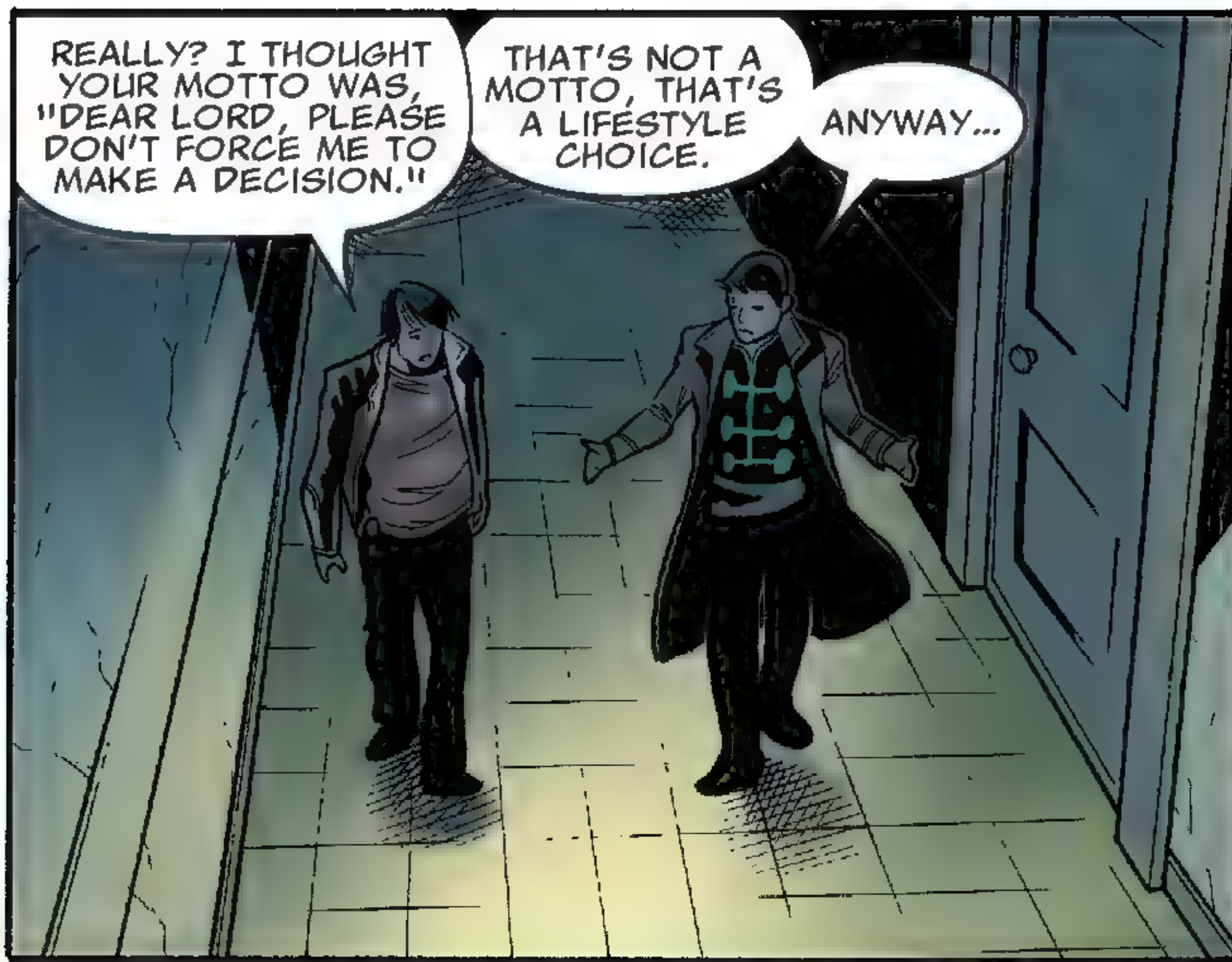






...YOU'LL
THANK ME
LATER.

"FIGHT FIRE
WITH FIRE,
RICKTOR. THAT'S
MY MOTTO."





"YOU MADE AN APPOINTMENT AND THEN SAT AROUND? PRETTY hardcore, MADROX."

"HEY, FIVE MORE MINUTES AND I WOULD'VE STARTED KICKING BUTT, LET ME TELL YOU."

THE MAYOR WILL SEE YOU NOW.



MR. MADROX. HAVE A SEAT.

I THINK STANDING IS BETTER.

WHATEVER. SO I HAVE YOUR APPLICATION TO START A SMALL BUSINESS. OR RATHER, RESTART IT.



YOUR PREVIOUS ENDEAVOR RESULTED IN AN ENTIRE SECTION OF THE CITY BEING BLOWN UP.

THAT WASN'T OUR FAULT.

IT NEVER IS.



LOOK... X-FACTOR INVESTIGATIONS IS GOING TO BE ABOVEBOARD.

WE'RE NOT HIDING BEHIND MASKS. OUR SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE TO EVERYONE.

WE'RE A SPECIAL NEEDS BUSINESS AND THERE'S NOTHING ILLEGAL ABOUT OUR OPERATION.



IF YOU'RE NOT DOING ANYTHING ILLEGAL, WHY COME TO ME IN THE FIRST PLACE?

BECAUSE, FRANKLY, I DON'T THINK YOU'RE ABOVE USING THE POWERS OF THIS OFFICE TO TRY AND DRIVE US OUT OF BUSINESS.

AND I WANT TO HEAD THAT OFF.



DO YOU.



CAN I PREDICT THAT NO ONE IS GOING TO TRY AND FIREBOMB US? NO.

BUT THERE'S NO REASON FOR THEM TO DO IT. WE'RE NOT ABOUT GETTING INTO HUGE BATTLES WITH WORLD DESTROYERS.

WE'RE JUST THERE TO HELP PEOPLE WHO CAN PAY FOR OUR SERVICES.



AND WE HAVE AS MUCH RIGHT TO BE HERE AS ANYONE ELSE--

FINE.

--TO WORK IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR, AND BE AVAILABLE TO--

I SAID FINE.



WAIT... WHAT?



I SLAMMED ON THE BRAKES AND YOU WENT RIGHT PAST. I SAID...FINE.

THERE'S A "BUT" COMING, ISN'T THERE.

BUT...



SOMEDAY... AND THAT DAY MAY NEVER COME...I WILL CALL UPON YOU TO DO A SERVICE FOR ME.



HE QUOTED
"THE GODFATHER"?
SERIOUSLY?

ACTUALLY,
AS IT TURNED OUT,
HE'D NEVER SEEN
THE FILM.

APPARENTLY
YEARS AGO,
PUZO GOT THE
LINE FROM
HIM.



OKAY, BUT
IF HE ACCUSES
YOU OF TREATING
HIM WITH
DISRESPECT, I'M
OUTTA HERE.



MR.
MADROX.

MR. MAYOR.
THIS IS MY
ASSOCIATE,
RICTOR.

MUTANT?

FORMER.

BEST
KIND.



SO
WHAT CAN I
DO FOR YOU,
MR. MAYOR?

YOU CAN
SOLVE A
MURDER
FOR ME.

IF IT'S
SOMETHING YOU'RE
ACCUSING SPIDER-MAN
OF DOING, I'LL TELL
YOU RIGHT NOW, HE'LL
TURN OUT TO BE
INNOCENT.

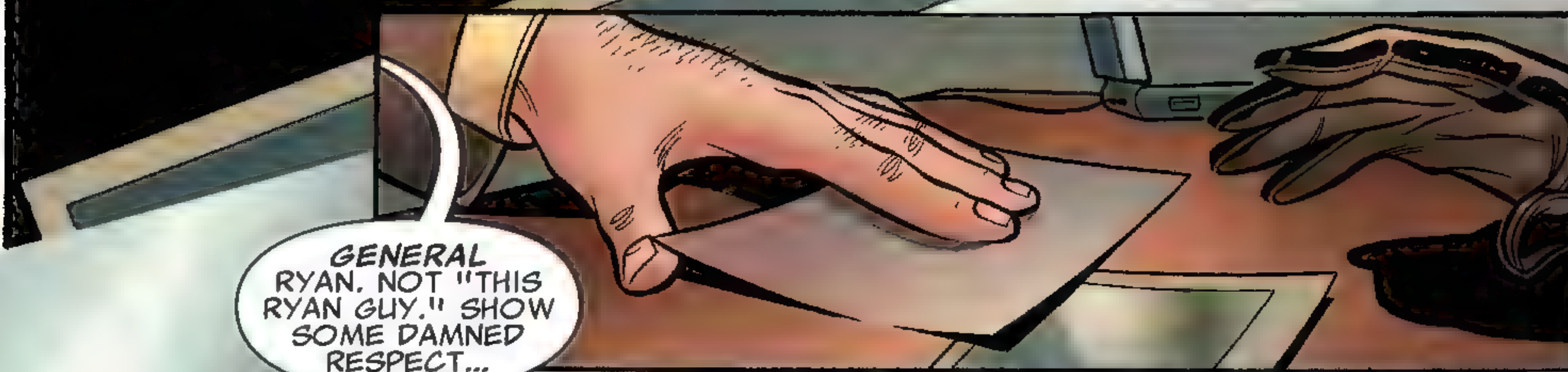


FOR ONCE,
THIS HAS NOTHING
TO DO WITH THE
WALLCRAWLER. IT
HAS TO DO WITH
THIS MAN.

THIS THE
VIC?

THAT
MEANS
"VICTIM"...

I KNOW
WHAT IT MEANS.
YOU THINK I
NEVER WORKED
A CRIME BEAT?





WE SHOULD BE DOWN THERE...

NO. WE SHOULDN'T. WE DON'T KNOW WHY THEY'RE HERE.

FOR ALL WE KNOW, THOSE "GUARDS" COULD BE DISGUISED SENTINELS OR GOD-KNOWS-WHAT.

SO WE'RE HIDING? THAT HARDLY SOUNDS...

OF COURSE NOT. WE'RE HOLDING OURSELVES IN RESERVE SO THAT IF THEY NEED US...

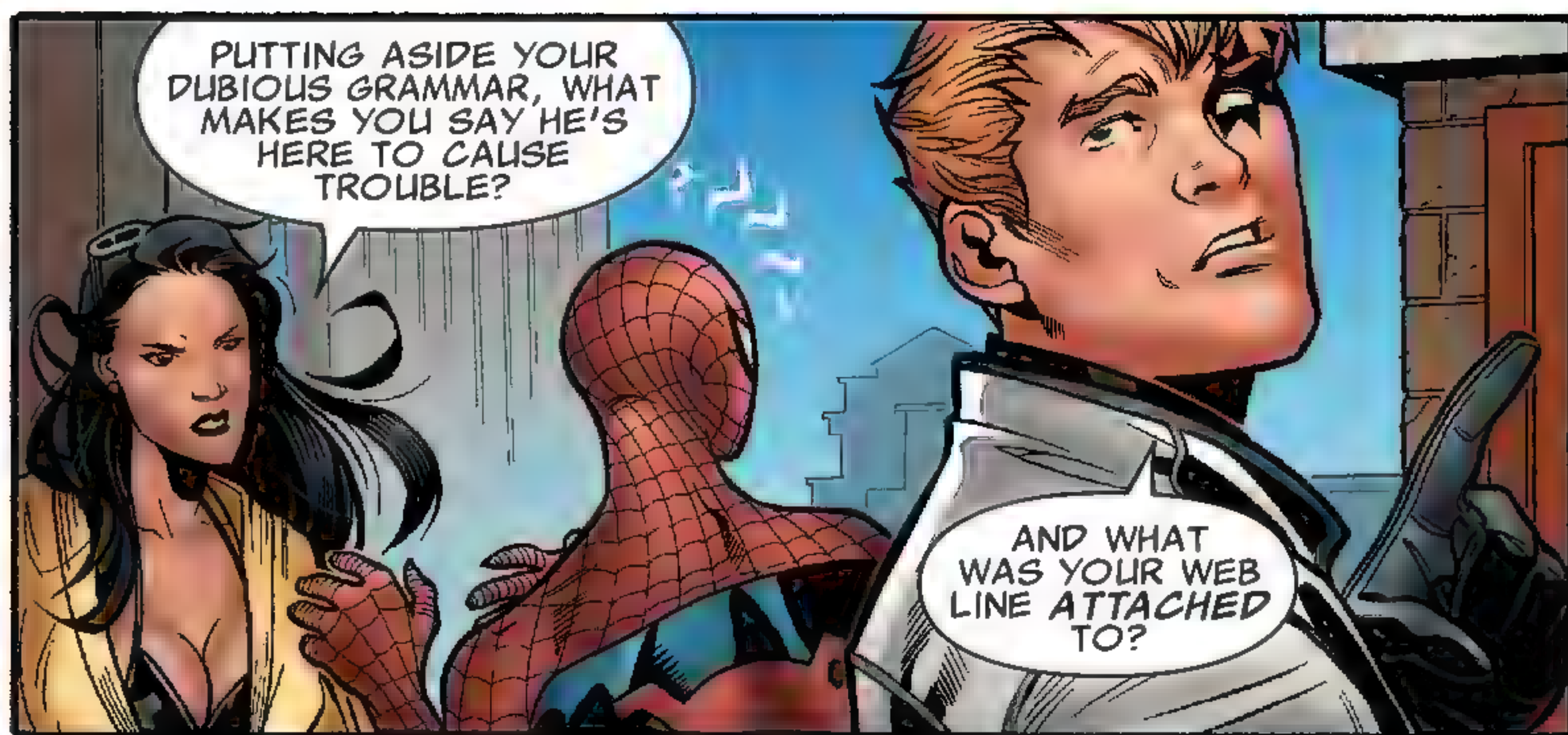
...WE SWOOP IN AND SAVE THE DAY.

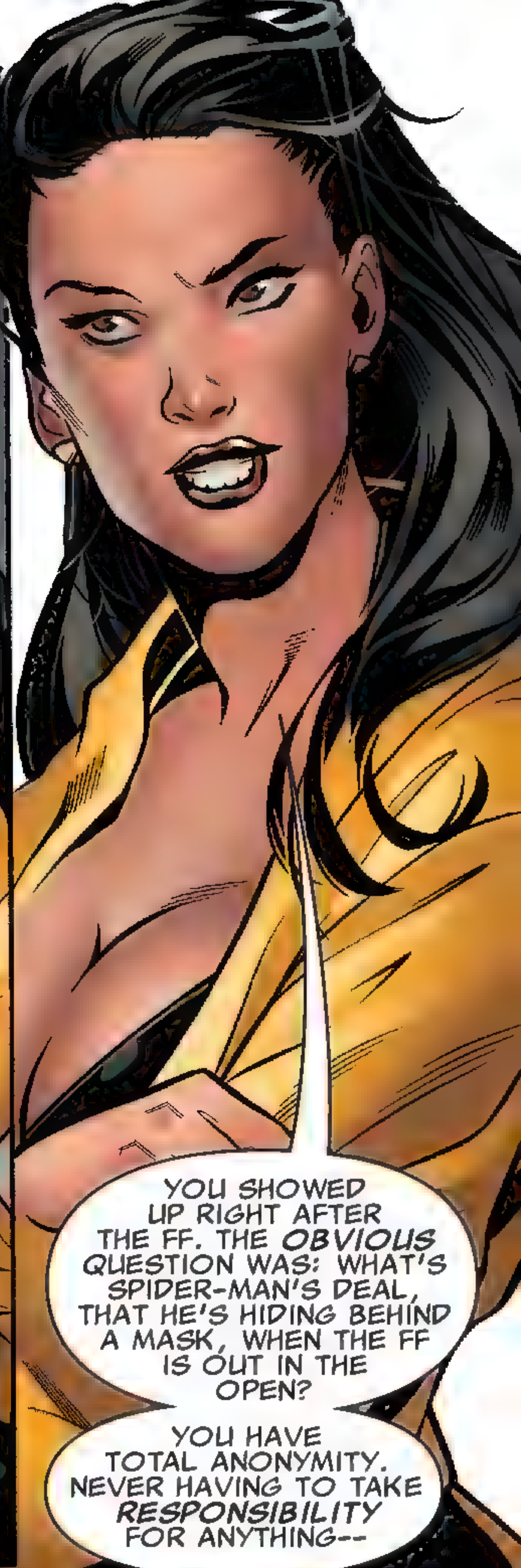
YOU THINK OF EVERYTHING, DON'T YOU?

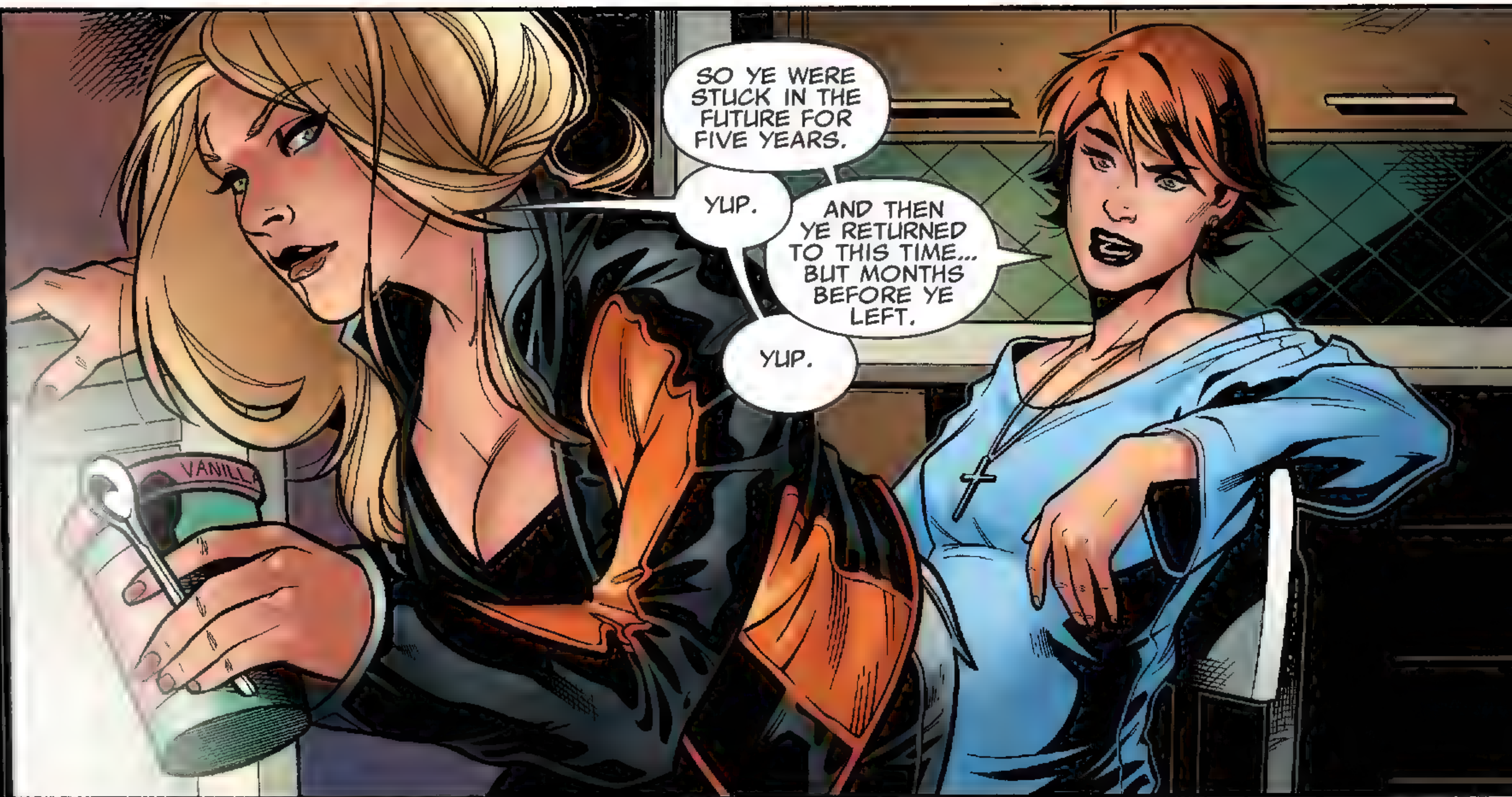
EXCEPT FOR WATCHING YOUR BACK.



YOU MAY WANNA STAY ON TOP OF THAT.





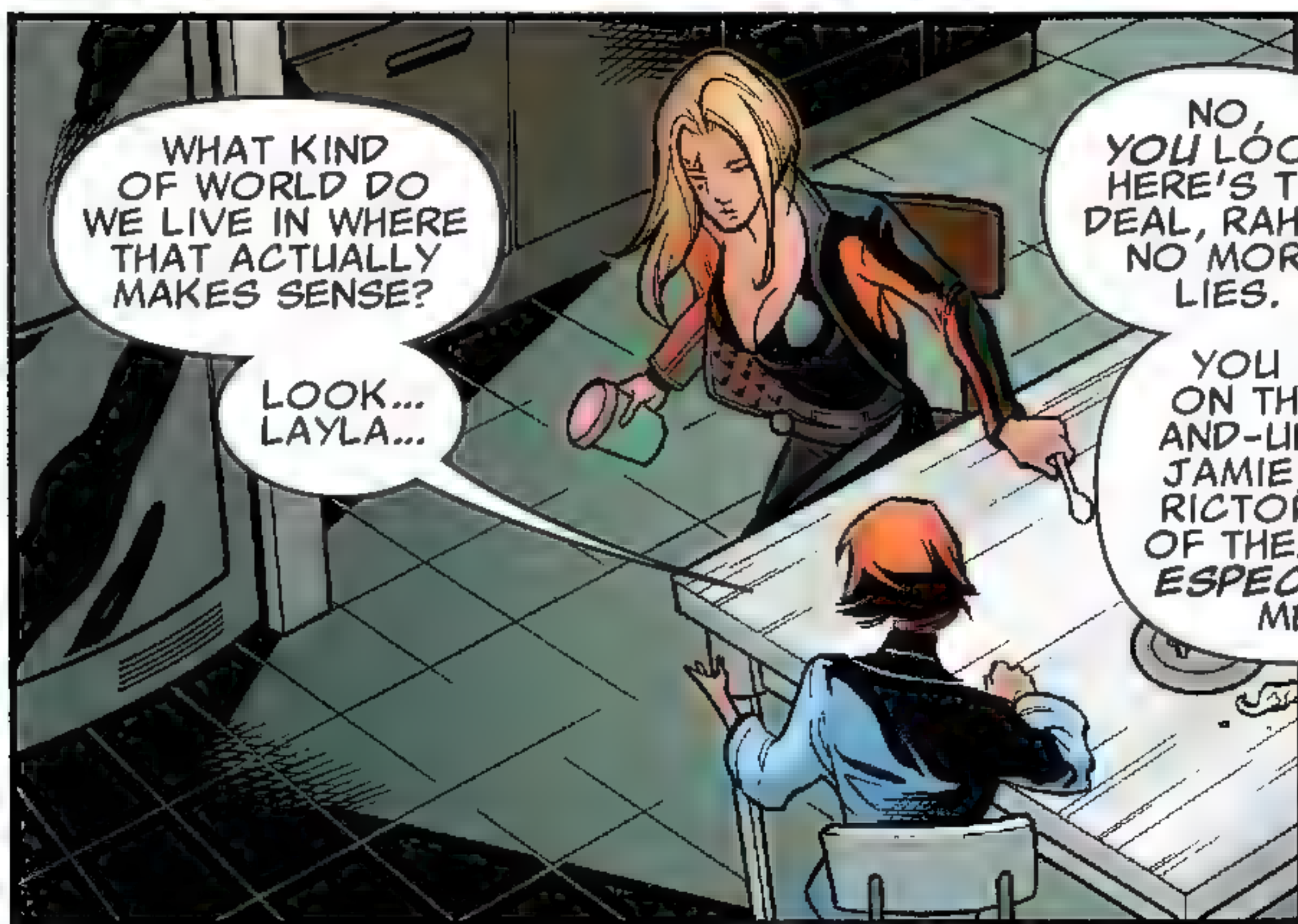


SO YE WERE STUCK IN THE FUTURE FOR FIVE YEARS.

YUP.

AND THEN YE RETURNED TO THIS TIME... BUT MONTHS BEFORE YE LEFT.

YUP.

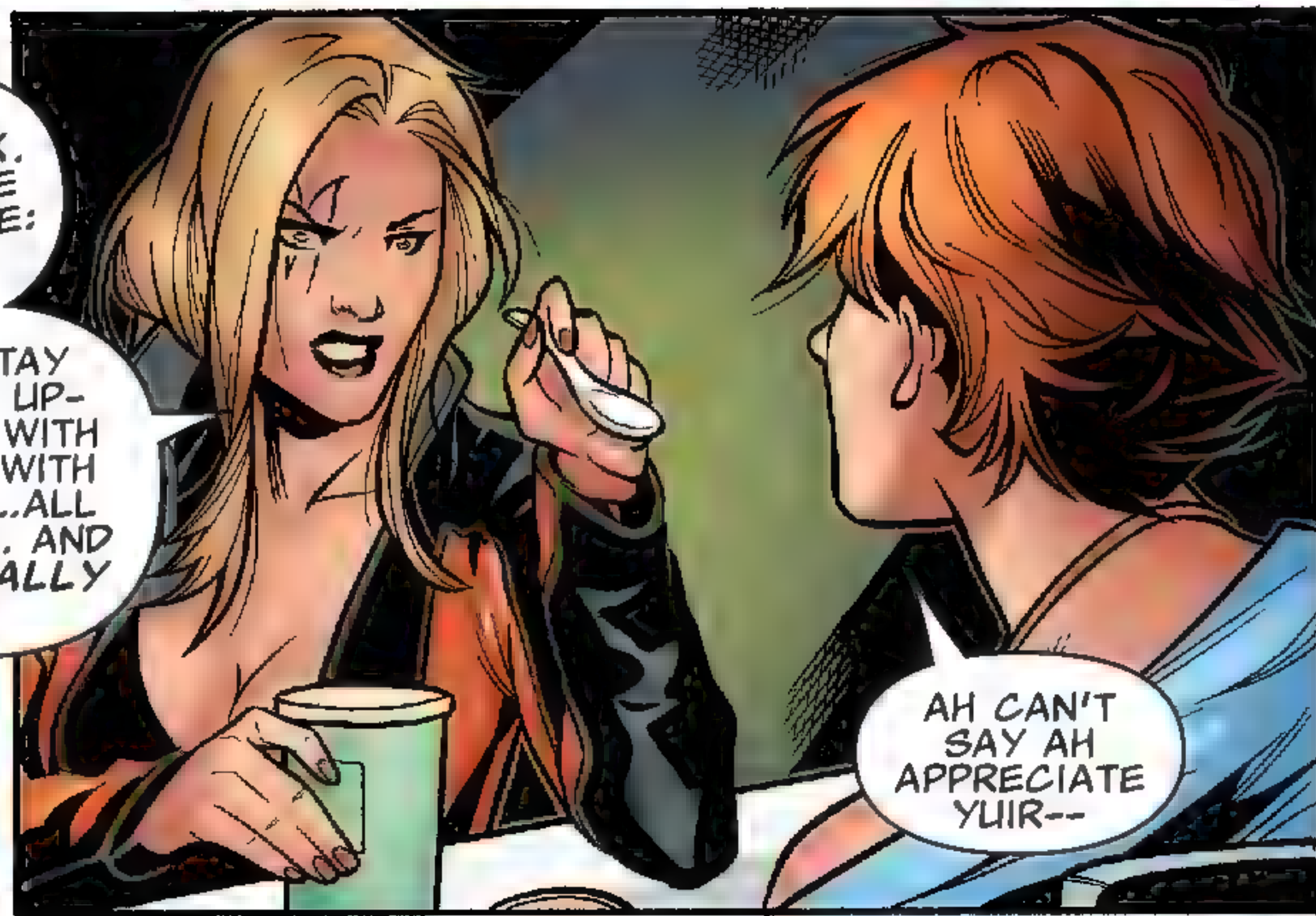


WHAT KIND OF WORLD DO WE LIVE IN WHERE THAT ACTUALLY MAKES SENSE?

LOOK... LAYLA...

NO, YOU LOOK. HERE'S THE DEAL, RAHNE: NO MORE LIES.

YOU STAY ON THE UP-AND-UP WITH JAMIE, WITH RICTOR... ALL OF THEM. AND ESPECIALLY ME.



AH CAN'T SAY AH APPRECIATE YUIR--



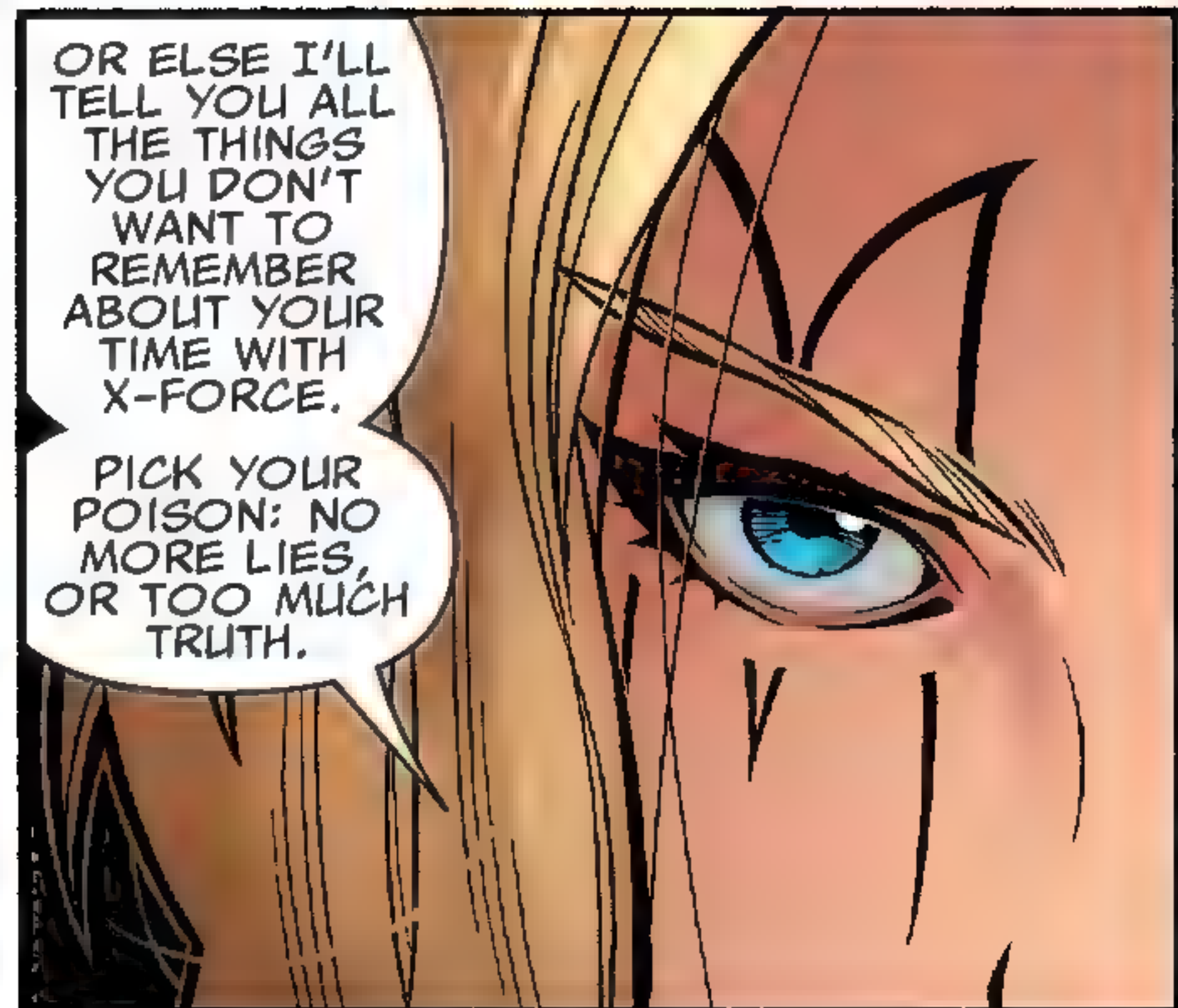
DO YOU THINK I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THE WEDDING NIGHT? ABOUT OUR BLOOD ON YOUR CLAWS?



YOU MUST HAVE GOOD REASONS COMING HERE WITH THAT HANGING OVER YOUR HEAD.

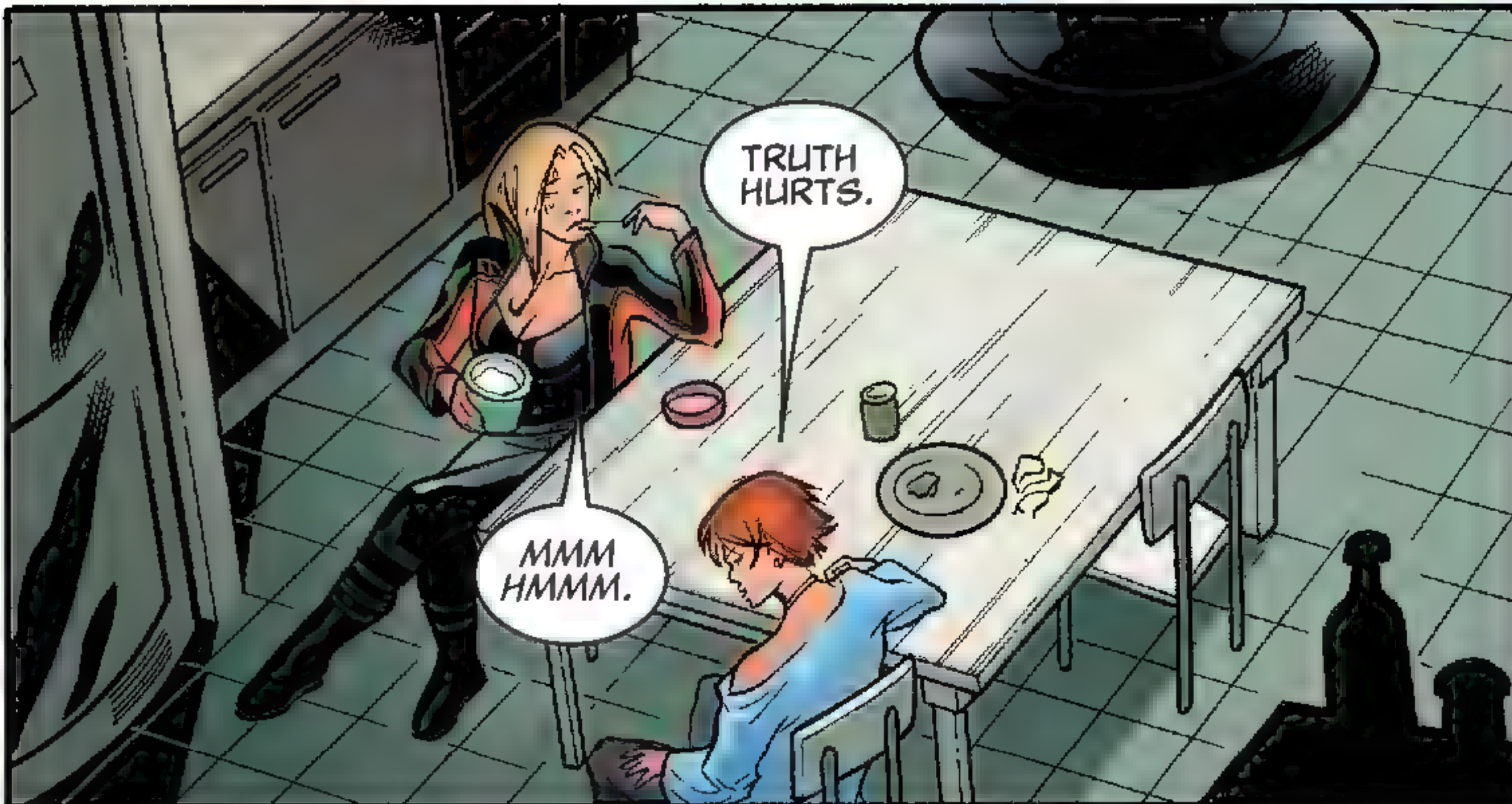
KEEP THEM TO YOURSELF, IF YOU WISH. BUT DON'T SCREW WITH ME, OR ELSE--

OR ELSE WHAT?



OR ELSE I'LL TELL YOU ALL THE THINGS YOU DON'T WANT TO REMEMBER ABOUT YOUR TIME WITH X-FORCE.

PICK YOUR POISON: NO MORE LIES, OR TOO MUCH TRUTH.



TRUTH HURTS.

MMM HMMM.





WH-WHAT
HAVE YOU
DONE TO...?

AHHHH.
THAT'S
MORE
LIKE IT.



JUST SO
YOU KNOW,
I DIDN'T DO
IT TO YOU.

OTHER
PEOPLE
DID.

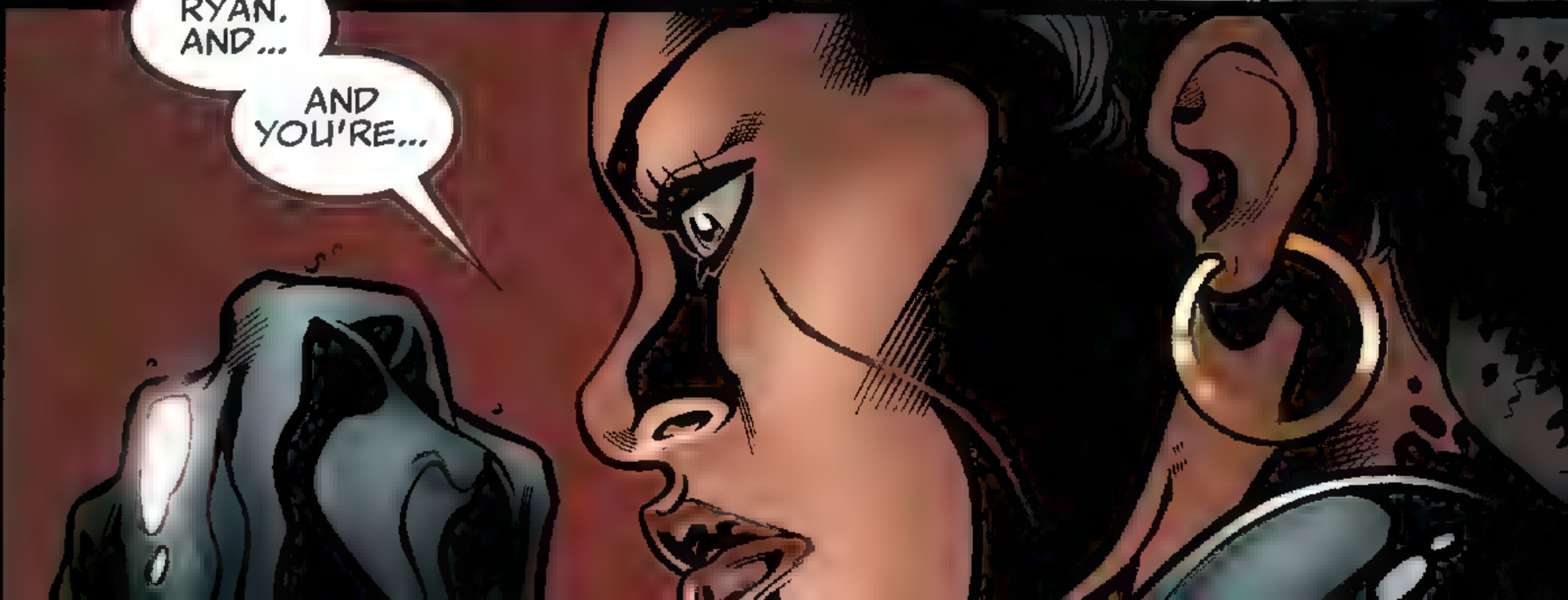
OTHER...?

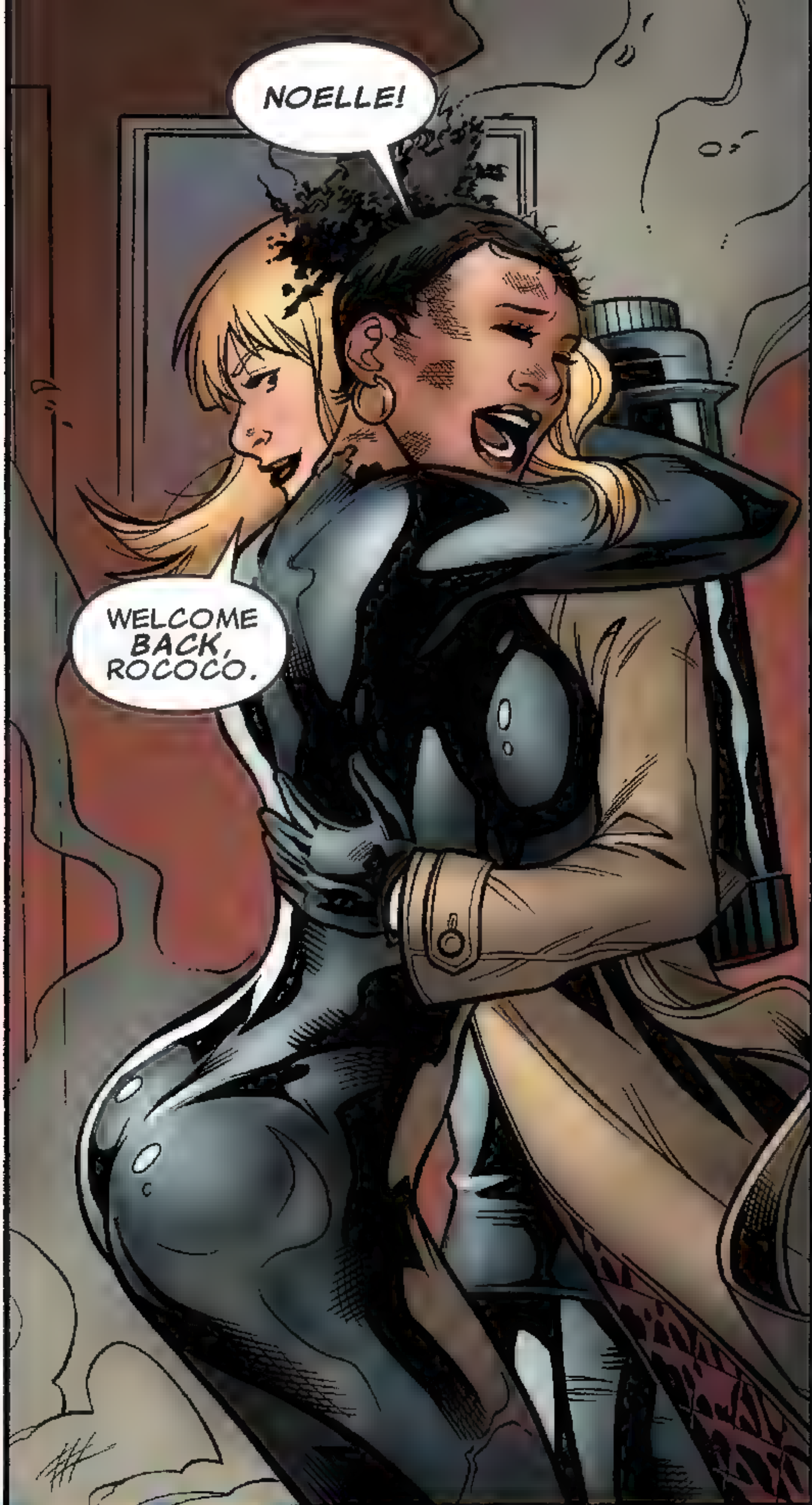


OH...MY
GOD,

RYAN,
AND...

AND
YOU'RE...





NOELLE!

WELCOME
BACK,
ROCOCO.



WOW. YOU
LOOK LIKE
CRAP, KID.

WE'VE
BOTH SEEN
BETTER
DAYS,
ROCKY.

HOW THE
HELL DID I WIND
UP AS A NURSE IN...
WHERE AM I?

OMAHA.



GRAB SOME
FRESH SCRUBS
AND WE'LL GET
YOU THE HELL OUT
OF HERE.

GOOD
IDEA.



SO WHERE'RE WE
GOING? BECAUSE
THE WHOLE "THELMA
AND LOUISE" BIT
REALLY ISN'T MY
THING...

WE'RE
HEADING TO
NEW YORK. NO
DETOURS FOR
CANYONS,
I SWEAR.

WHAT'S
IN NEW
YORK?



SYL.
SHE'S
WAITING
FOR US.

OUTSTANDING.
ANY PLANS FOR
WHAT TO DO
ONCE WE GET
THERE?

WELL, I
FIGURE WE'LL
KILL J. JONAH
JAMESON, AND
MAYBE TAKE IN
A SHOW.



SOUNDS
LIKE A
PLAN.





**CITY HALL
MANHATTAN**

MR. MAYOR, IS THERE SOMETHING YOU'VE FORGOTTEN TO TELL ME?

LIKE THAT YOU HIRED SOME DETECTIVE AGENCY TO LOOK INTO THE RYAN KILLING?



NEED I REMIND YOU THAT I'M YOUR HEAD OF INVESTIGATION?

ARE YOU DISSATISFIED WITH MY WORK?

NOT AT ALL, MS. HARDY.



BUT GENERAL RYAN IS NOT A NEW YORK CITIZEN, NOR WAS HE KILLED IN NEW YORK.

I WON'T HAVE THE TAXPAYERS' DOLLARS PAYING YOU TO LOOK INTO WHAT IS, FOR ME, A PRIVATE MATTER.



CAN WE TALK ABOUT THIS IN PERSON?

CAN'T RIGHT NOW. ON MY WAY TO THE PROTEST.



MR. MAYOR, ARE YOU ON YOUR CELL PHONE?

YOU KNOW THAT'S NOT A SECURE LINE, RIGHT? YOU SHOULDN'T BE BROADCASTING YOUR WHEREABOUTS.

YEAH, WHY?



OH, FELICIA, FOR GOD'S SAKE...



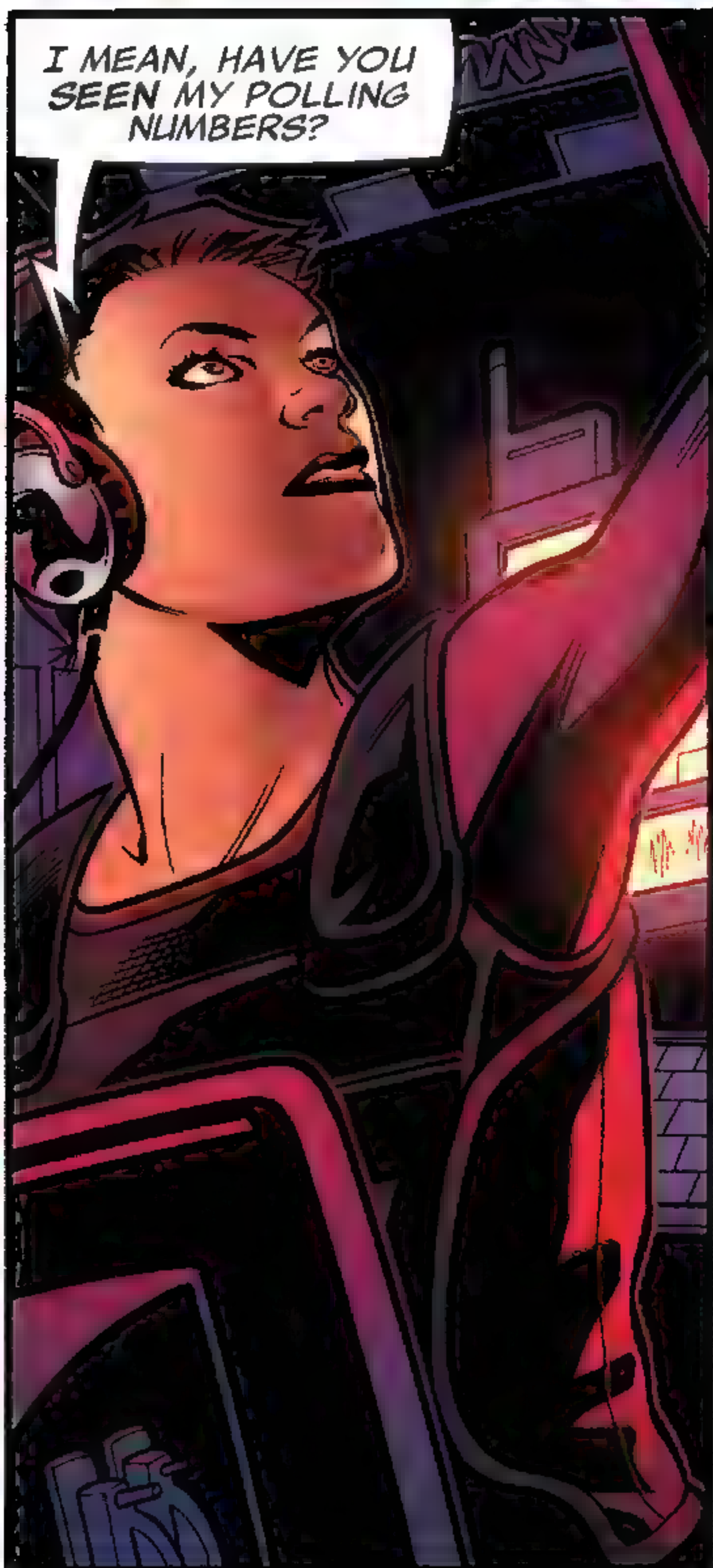
...COULD
YOU BE ANY
MORE
PARANOID?



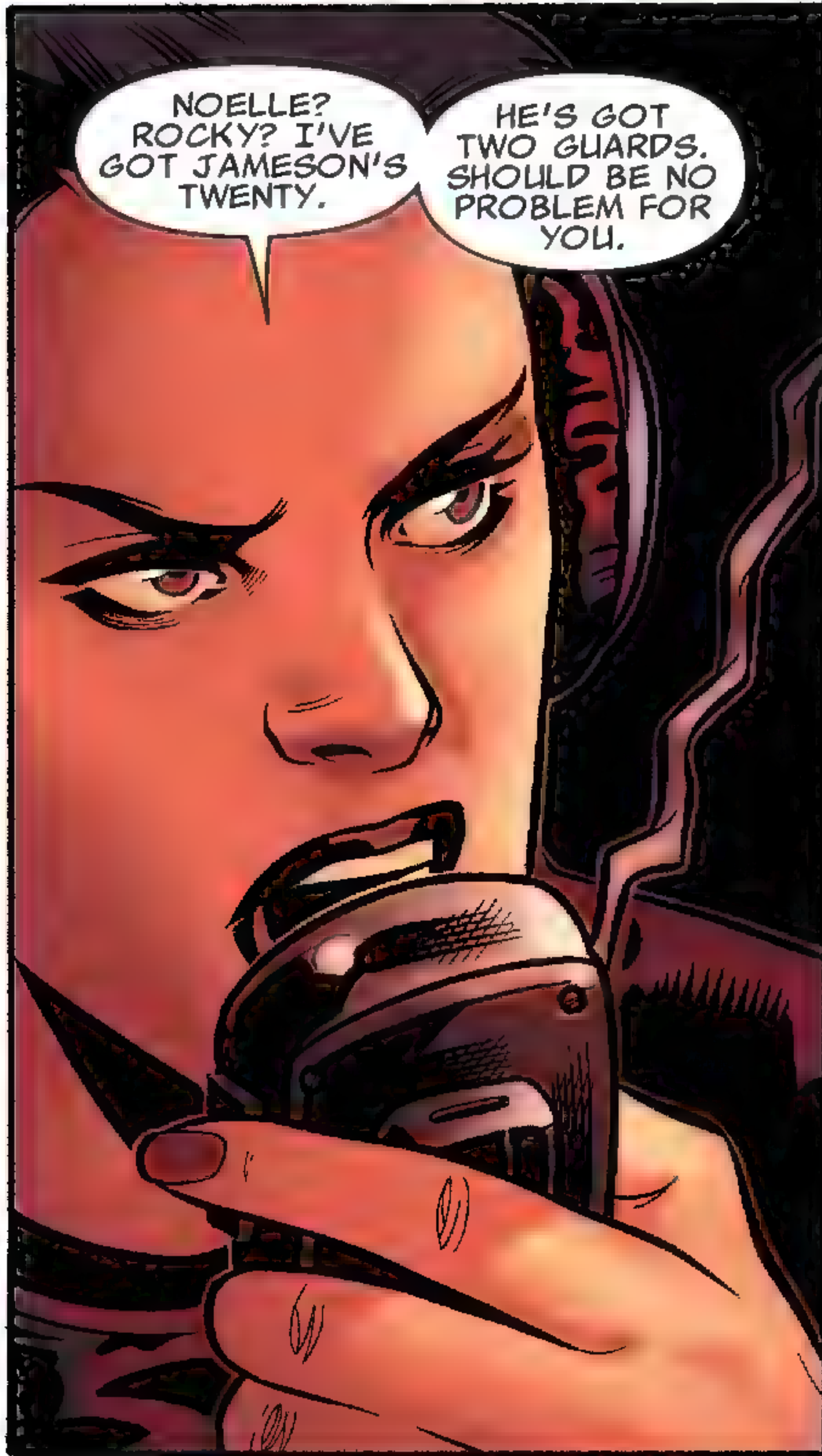
FIRST OF ALL,
MY CONVERSATIONS
AREN'T ALL THAT
INTERESTING.

SECOND, I
HAVE TWO
SECURITY
GUARDS.

AND BESIDES,
WHO WOULD
BE AFTER ME?
I'M BELOVED.



I MEAN, HAVE YOU
SEEN MY POLLING
NUMBERS?



NOELLE?
ROCKY? I'VE
GOT JAMESON'S
TWENTY.

HE'S GOT
TWO GUARDS.
SHOULD BE NO
PROBLEM FOR
YOU.

DEEP SOARS



NO
PROBLEM AT
ALL, SYL.

ASK FOR
J. JONAH JAMESON
TOMORROW...

...AND YOU
WILL FIND HIM A
GRAVE MAN.



**RICHMOND CEMETERY,
VIRGINIA.**

WE SEEM
TO SPEND AN
INORDINATE AMOUNT
OF TIME IN
GRAVEYARDS.

COULD
BE WORSE,
LONGSHOT.
WE COULD BE
FIGHTING
VAMPIRES.

MUTANTS
FIGHTING VAMPIRES?
HOW WEIRD WOULD
THAT BE?

BUT YOU'RE
NOT A MUTANT
ANYMORE,
RICTOR.

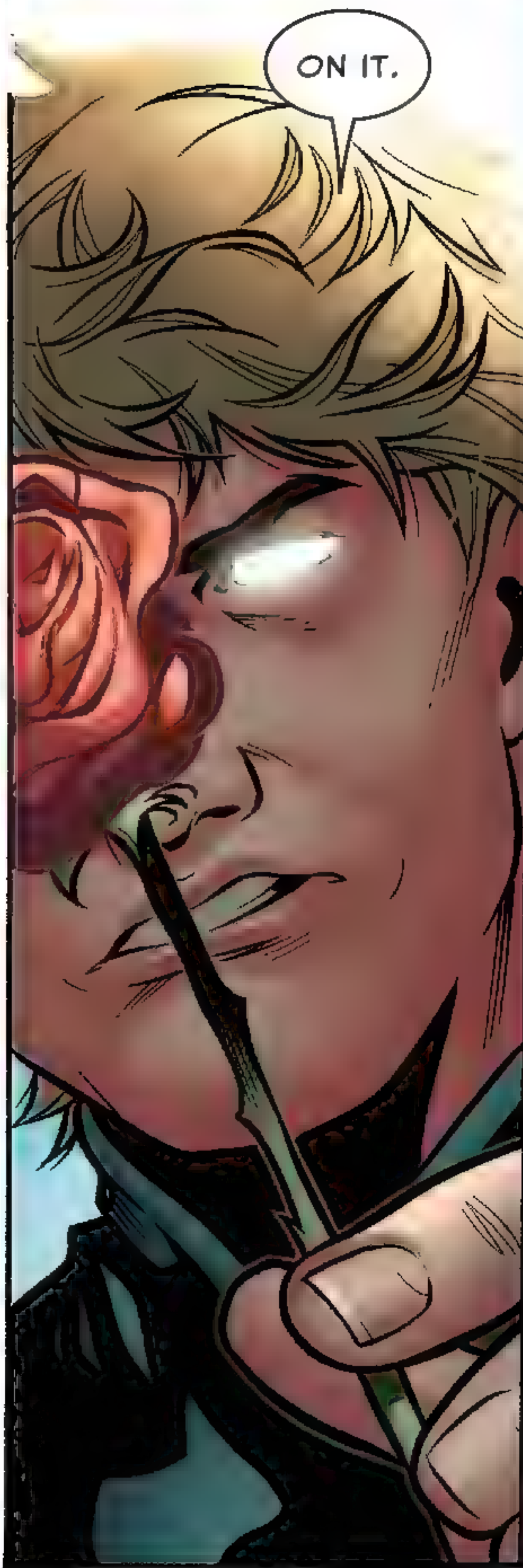
YEAH,
THANKS FOR
REMINING
ME THERE,
STAR.



THERE.
THERE IT
IS.

GUESS THEY
HAVEN'T HAD A
CHANCE TO BURY
THE GENERAL YET.
BUT THAT'S
DEFINITELY HIS
WIFE'S GRAVE.







THE SHOOTER WAS A WOMAN. SHE'S STANDING JUST TO THE RIGHT, MADROX.

WHOSE RIGHT? MY RIGHT OR YOUR RIGHT?

DOES IT MATTER?

I... GUESS NOT, NO.



RICTOR! GET OVER HERE!

BUT SHATTERSTAR WAS JUST ABOUT TO TELL ME--

IT CAN WAIT!



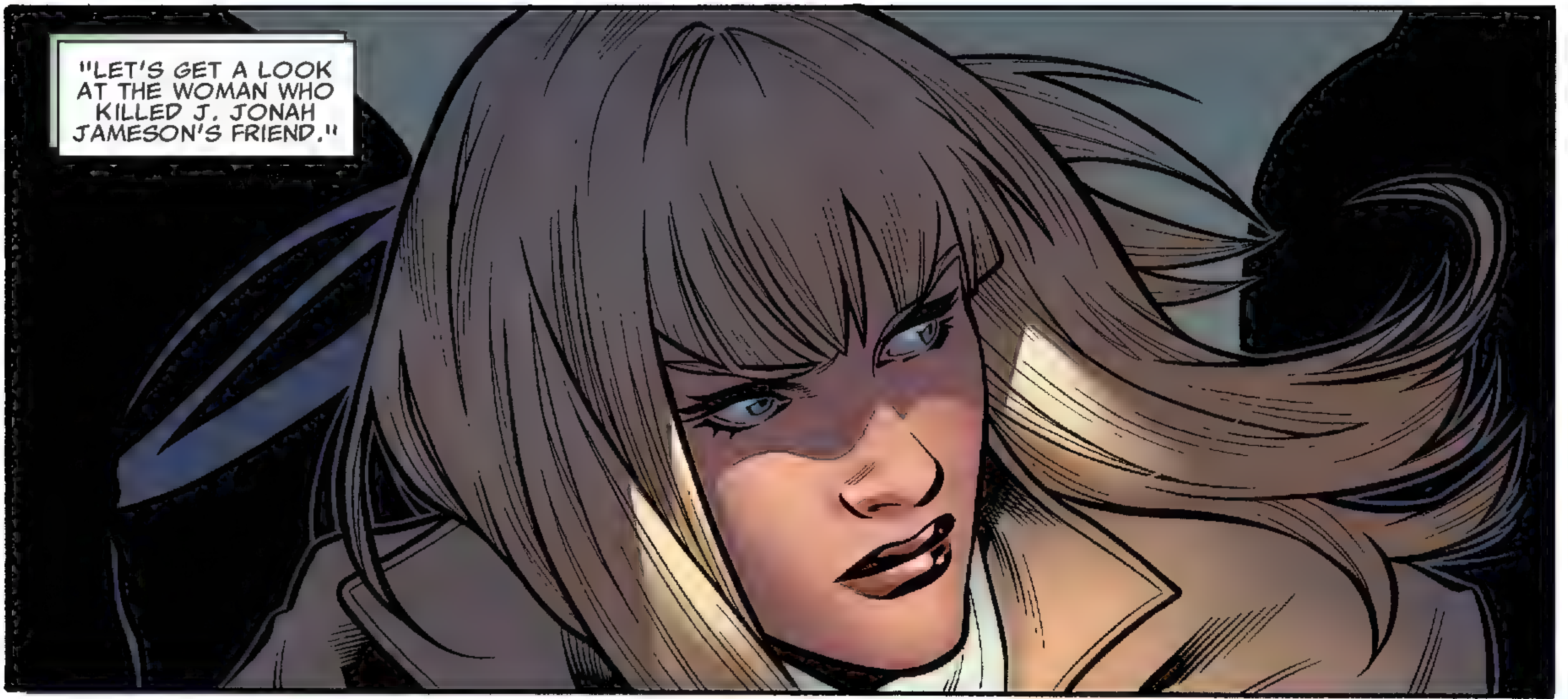
ALL RIGHT, ALL RIGHT! SHEESH.

GOT THAT COMPUTER PAD OF YOURS?

RIGHT HERE.



OKAY, LET'S START WITH THE SHAPE OF HER HEAD.





CARE TO
TAKE IT UP
WITH ME?

NO
FREE
RIDES

FOR
AMERICANS

NO
FREE
RIDES

STOP THE
INVASION





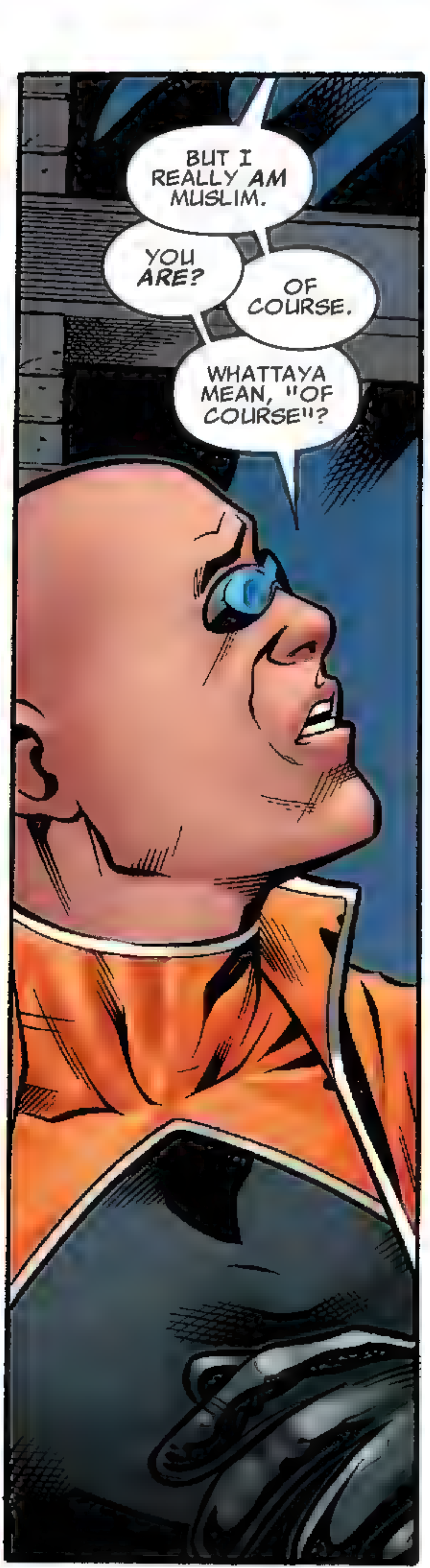
WELL? COME ON. HERE'S THE FACE OF THE "ENEMY." SAY WHAT YOU WANT, BECAUSE I'M A MUSLIM.

YEAH, ME TOO.



WHAT ARE YOU--? YOU'RE NOT MUSLIM!

I FIGGERED WE WUZ DOIN' A WHOLE "I'M SPARTACUS" THING WHERE WE ALL SHOUT OUT--



BUT I REALLY AM MUSLIM.

YOU ARE?

OF COURSE.

WHATTAYA MEAN, "OF COURSE"?



MY MOTHER'S ALGERIAN. NINETY-EIGHT PERCENT OF ALGERIANS ARE MUSLIMS. DO THE MATH.

WHY, DO YOU HAVE A PROBLEM WITH--?

NO! NOT AT... NO.



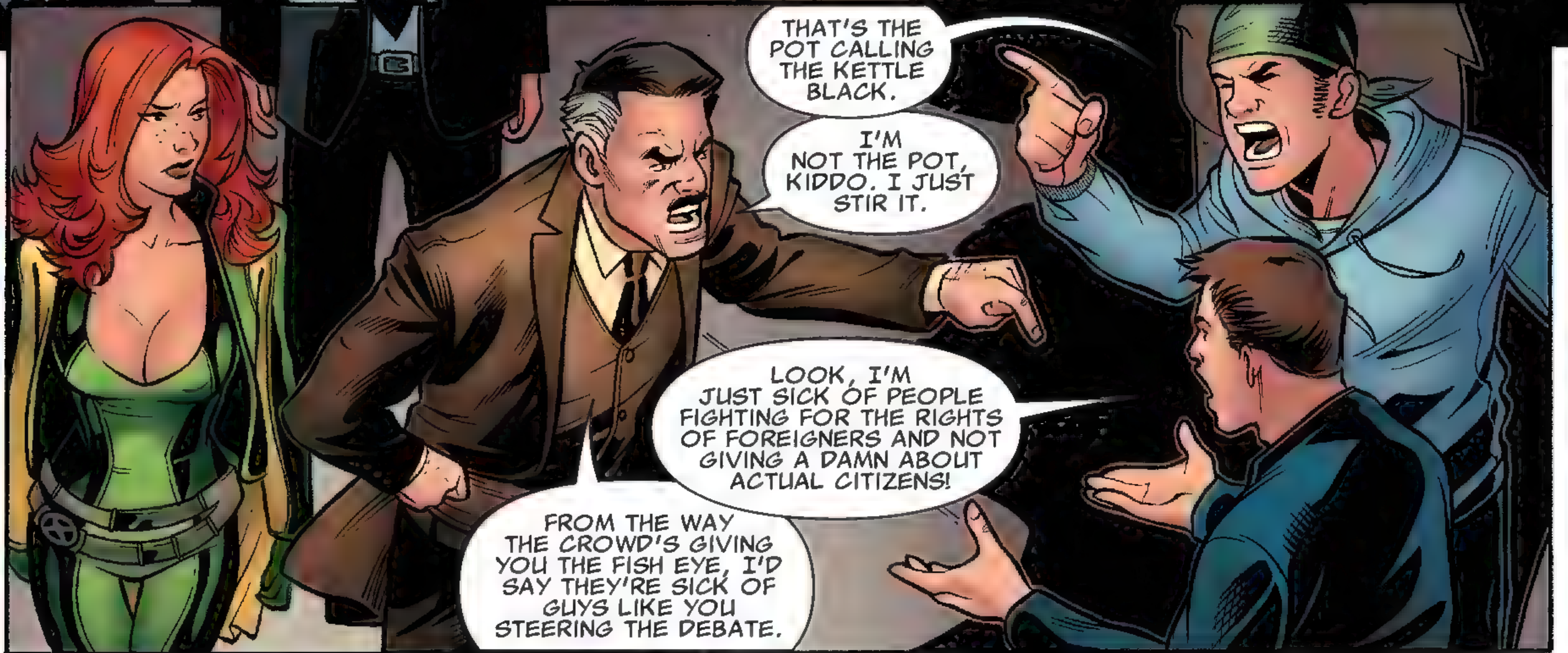
MAN, AND I WAS JUST STARTIN' TO WRAP MYSELF AROUND THE WHOLE GAY THING WITH RICTOR...





AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT THEY SAID IN 1960 SO PEOPLE WOULDN'T VOTE FOR JFK.

OF COURSE, THAT WAS ONE OF THE EXTREME VIEWS. FUNNY THING, THOUGH: EXTREMISTS OF ALL STRIPES GET THE MOST ATTENTION.



THAT'S THE POT CALLING THE KETTLE BLACK.

I'M NOT THE POT, KIDDO. I JUST STIR IT.

LOOK, I'M JUST SICK OF PEOPLE FIGHTING FOR THE RIGHTS OF FOREIGNERS AND NOT GIVING A DAMN ABOUT ACTUAL CITIZENS!

FROM THE WAY THE CROWD'S GIVING YOU THE FISH EYE, I'D SAY THEY'RE SICK OF GUYS LIKE YOU STEERING THE DEBATE.



THE BEST IDEAS STEER THE DEBATE, NOT THE PEOPLE! BOTTOM LINE, WE JUST WANT OUR COUNTRY BACK!



FUNNY THING: I KEEP HEARING THAT FROM THE FAR ENDS OF BOTH SIDES.

"WE WANT OUR COUNTRY BACK."

WHERE'D IT GO? IF NEITHER SIDE HAS IT, THEN WHO TOOK IT?



GUESS WHAT? I DID.



ME AND MY BIG WHITE ANCESTORS.

WE CAME ROLLING IN AND TOOK IT FROM THE PEOPLE WHO WERE HERE IN THE FIRST PLACE. AND RIGHT AFTER WE DID THAT, WE KIDNAPPED PEOPLE FROM AFRICA TO HELP US BUILD IT.

AND NOW WE'RE ALL WORRIED THAT KARMA'S COMING BACK TO BITE US ON THE KEISTER.

SO WE GOT TO FIGHT BACK BECAUSE OTHERWISE A HUNDRED YEARS FROM NOW, WE MIGHT BE THE ONES LIVING IN RESERVATIONS AND DYING OF SMALL POX.

WE CAN DO THAT. KEEP EVERYONE WE'RE AFRAID OF OUT. SEND INTRUDERS BACK WHERE THEY CAME FROM...

...OR MAYBE PUT 'EM IN CAMPS LIKE IN WORLD WAR II, 'CAUSE WE'RE AFRAID THEY'RE TERRORISTS.

OR MAYBE... AND IT'S A CRAZY IDEA, I KNOW...

MAYBE WE CAN STOP TREATING EVERYBODY LIKE THEY'RE THE DAMNED ENEMY.

SAYS THE GUY WHO HATES SUPER HEROES.



SAYS THE GUY WHO BELIEVES THAT ACTIONS HAVE CONSEQUENCES AND THAT THERE'S RULES OF LAW THAT SHOULD PROTECT EVERYONE...

...EVEN THE PEOPLE WE DON'T LIKE...

...PEOPLE WHO, IF YOU DISAGREE WITH THEM, THEY'RE NOT TRAITORS, AND IF THEY'RE NEW HERE, MAYBE THEY DESERVE THE KIND OF BREAK WE DIDN'T GIVE OTHERS.

NOW: YOU WANT TO ARGUE FACTS AND FIGURES AND IMPACT ON THE ECONOMY? LET'S DANCE.

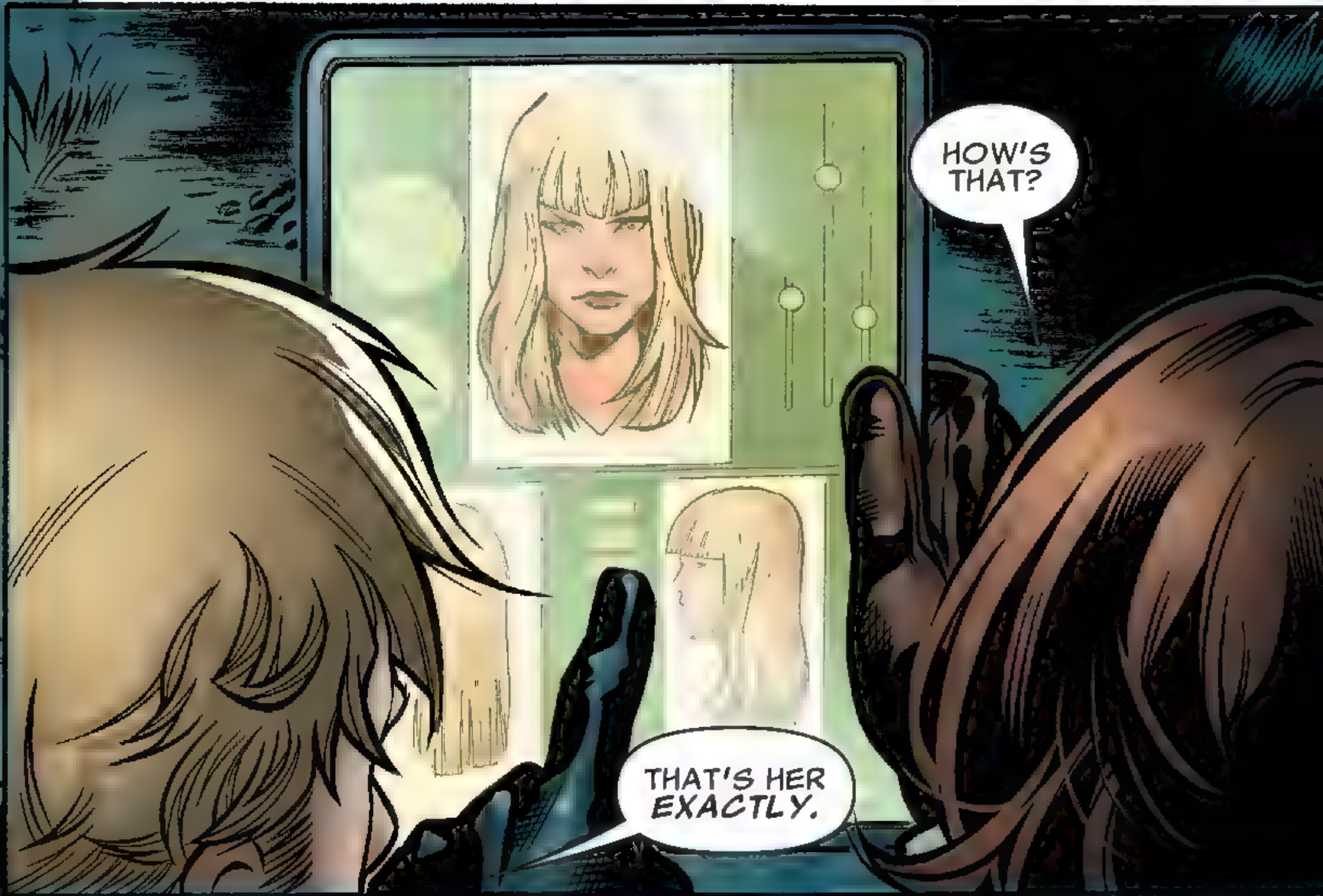


BUT IF YOU JUST WANNA THROW FEAR AND DIMWITTED SLOGANS AT ME? THEN GET OUT OF MY WAY 'CAUSE YOU'RE WASTING MY TIME.



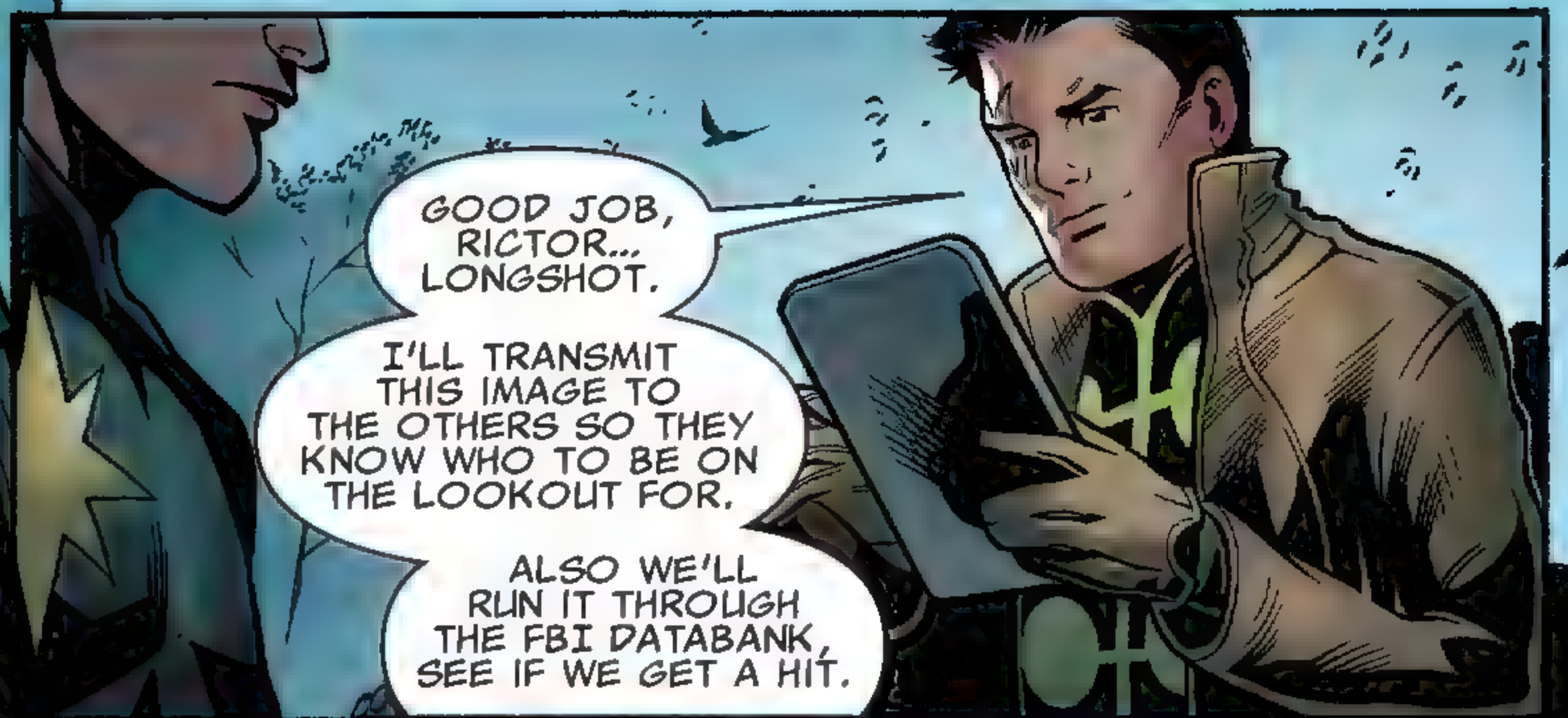
THERE!
THE PERFECT
EYES.

OKAY,
GOT IT.
AAAANND...



HOW'S
THAT?

THAT'S HER
EXACTLY.



GOOD JOB,
RICTOR...
LONGSHOT.

I'LL TRANSMIT
THIS IMAGE TO
THE OTHERS SO THEY
KNOW WHO TO BE ON
THE LOOKOUT FOR.

ALSO WE'LL
RUN IT THROUGH
THE FBI DATABANK,
SEE IF WE GET A HIT.



OKAY,
SO...YOU WERE
SAYING?

SAYING?

ABOUT YOU
AND LONGSHOT.
THAT YOU WERE
RELATED
SOMEHOW.

OH,
THAT. I WAS
JUST KIDDING,
RIC.



"KIDDING"?

YES.
ABSOLUTELY.



I DON'T
ACTUALLY HAVE
ANY CONNECTION
TO LONGSHOT.



NONE
AT ALL.



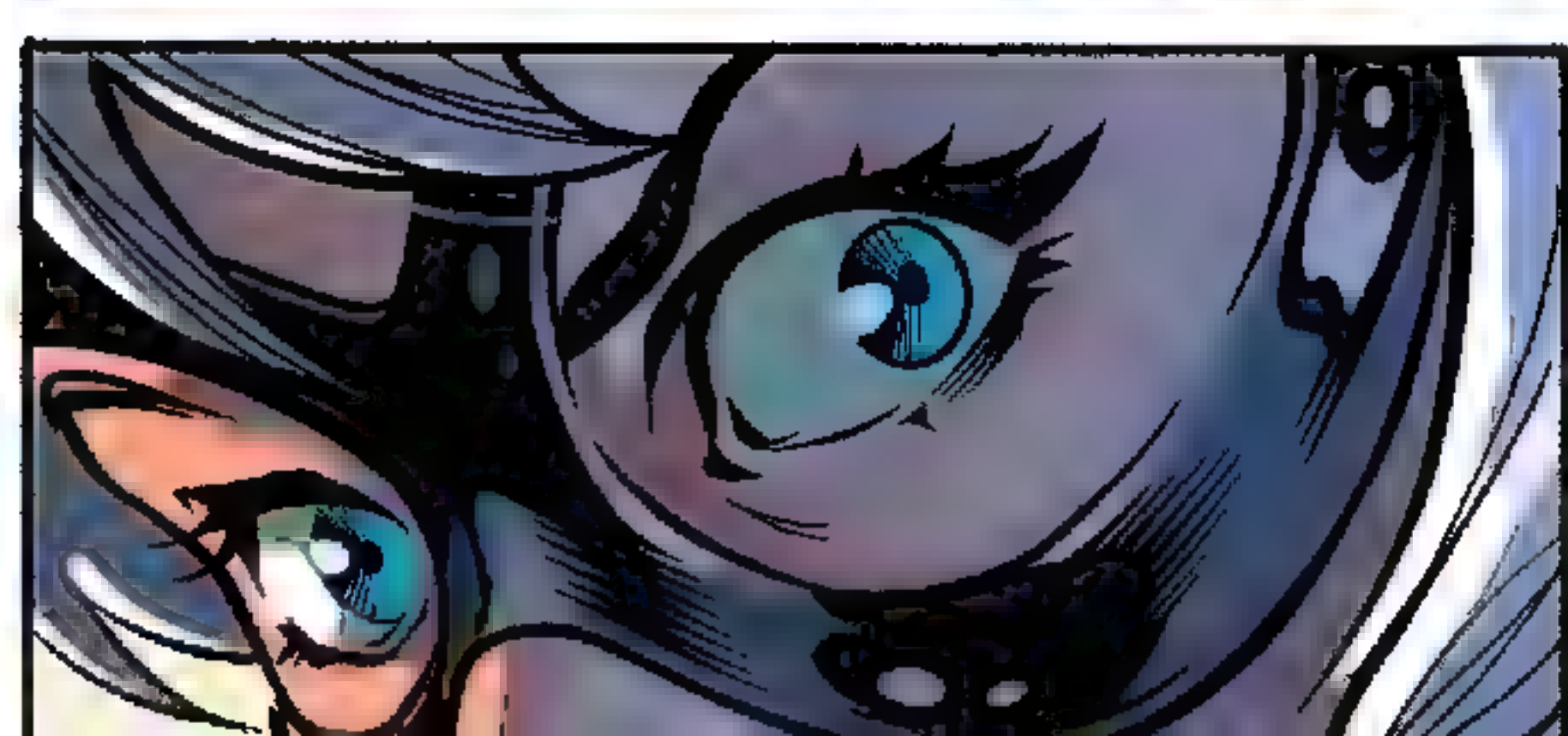
HUINH. LOOKS LIKE THE OLD MAN'S GOT SOME SERIOUS JUICE. WHO KNEW?

STILL, CONSIDERING ALL THE GRIEF HE'S GIVEN SPIDER, HE SEEMS MORE LIKE JUST A BIG OL' HYPOCRITE TO ME.



HE'S ALL FOR PEOPLES' RIGHTS UNLESS THEY'RE WEARING MASKS.

WELL, WHATEVER. HE IS MY BOSS, BOTTOM LINE, AND I HAVE TO HAVE HIS BACK.



BAD LUCK FOR YOU THAT I HEARD THAT!



BAD
LUCK FOR
YOU...

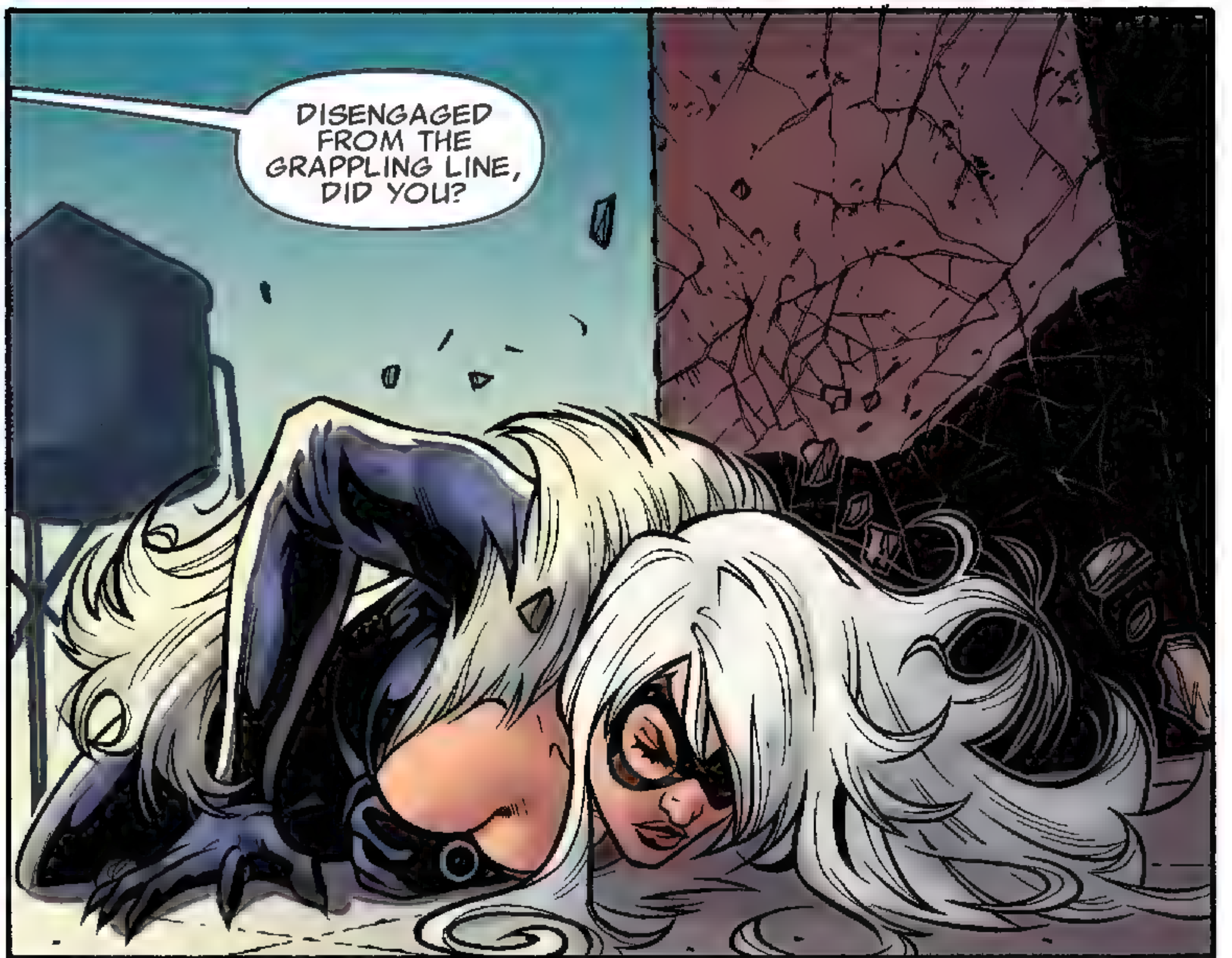
...THAT
YOU HAPPEN
TO BE...



...RIGHT
WHERE I
WANTED TO
SET UP.



WHOA!





ARRRRRH!!!

WHAT THE HELL---?! IT'S LIKE HITTING BRICK--!



SPEAKING OF HITTING THE BRICKS...

...WHY DON'T YOU?

LNNNFFFFF!



SORRY HONEY. YOU GOT SOME GOOD MOVES...

...AND ABSOLUTELY THE SWEETEST LITTLE RUMP...

...BUT I'M ON A SCHEDULE.



SYL? HIT A SPEED BUMP.

YOU OKAY, ROCOCO?

YEAH, IT'S ALL GOOD. I'M GETTING INTO POSITION.

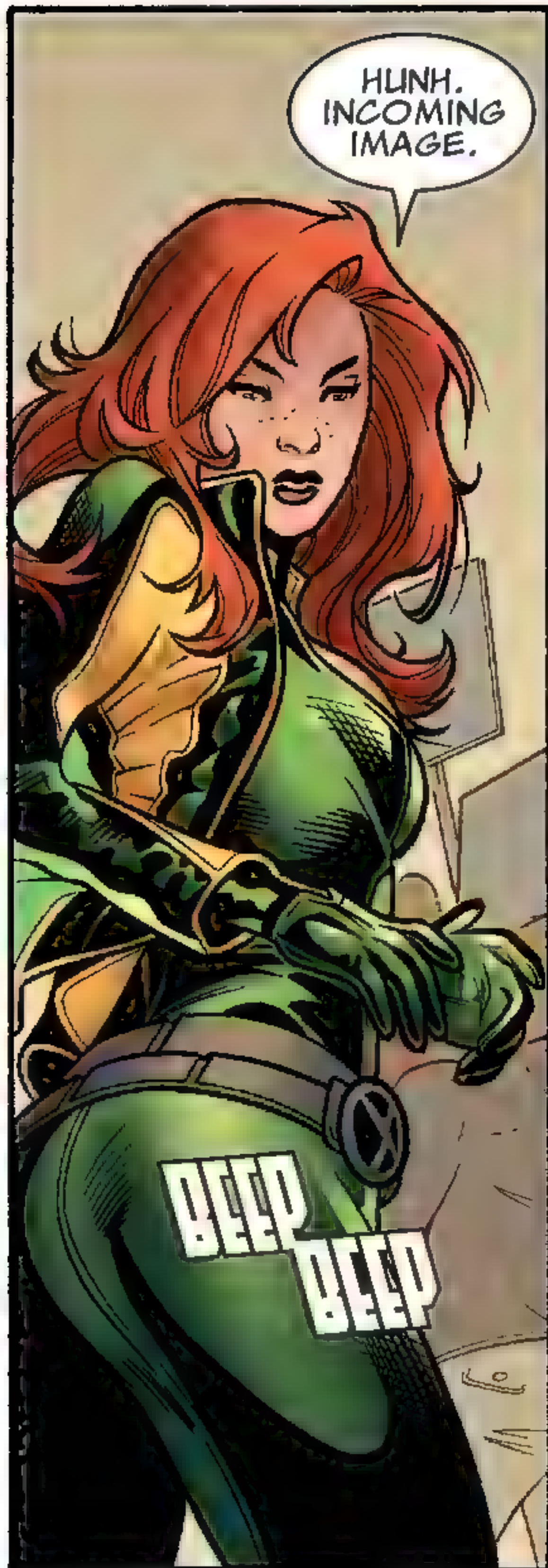


ALTHOUGH, Y'ASK ME, NOELLE'S NOT GONNA NEED ME.

I MEAN, I'M HAPPY TO BE BALLISTIQUE'S BACKUP, BUT LET'S FACE IT...



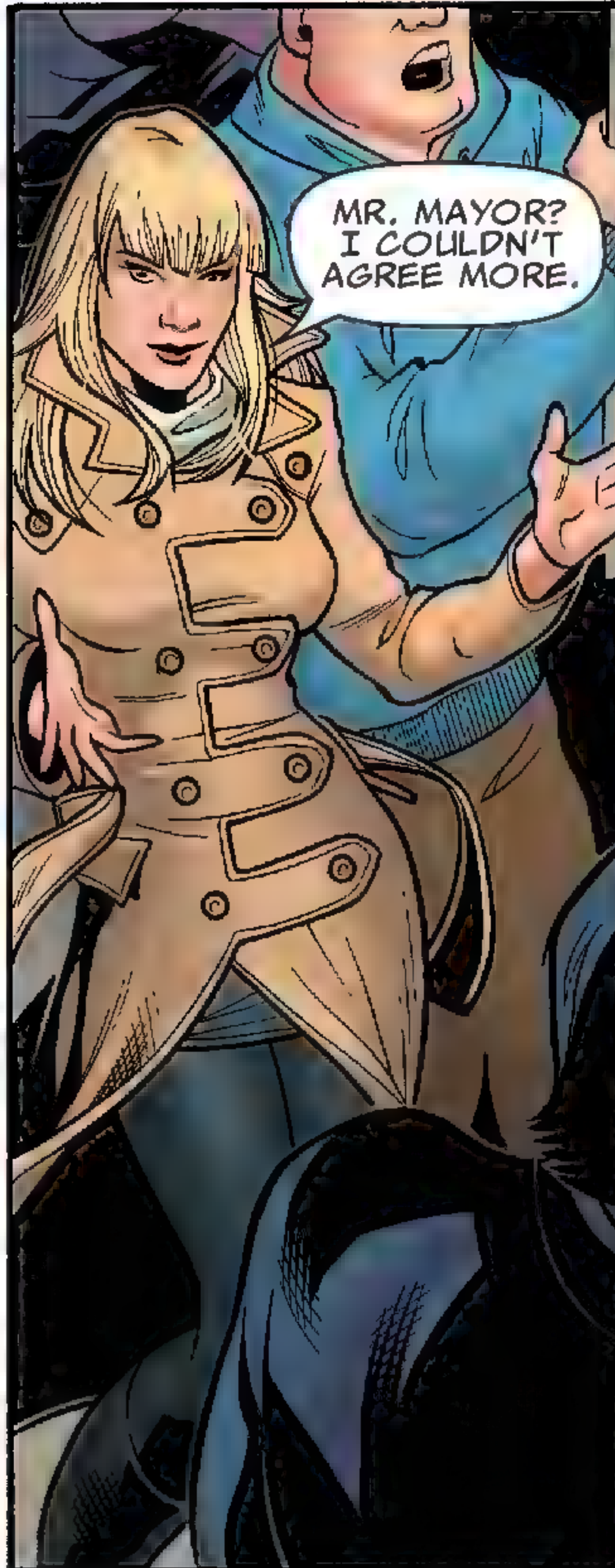
"JAMESON'S NEVER GONNA SEE IT COMING."



HUHH.
INCOMING
IMAGE.



SO THAT'S
OUR MURDER
SUSPECT.
CHARMING.



MR. MAYOR?
I COULDN'T
AGREE MORE.



OH,
REALLY?

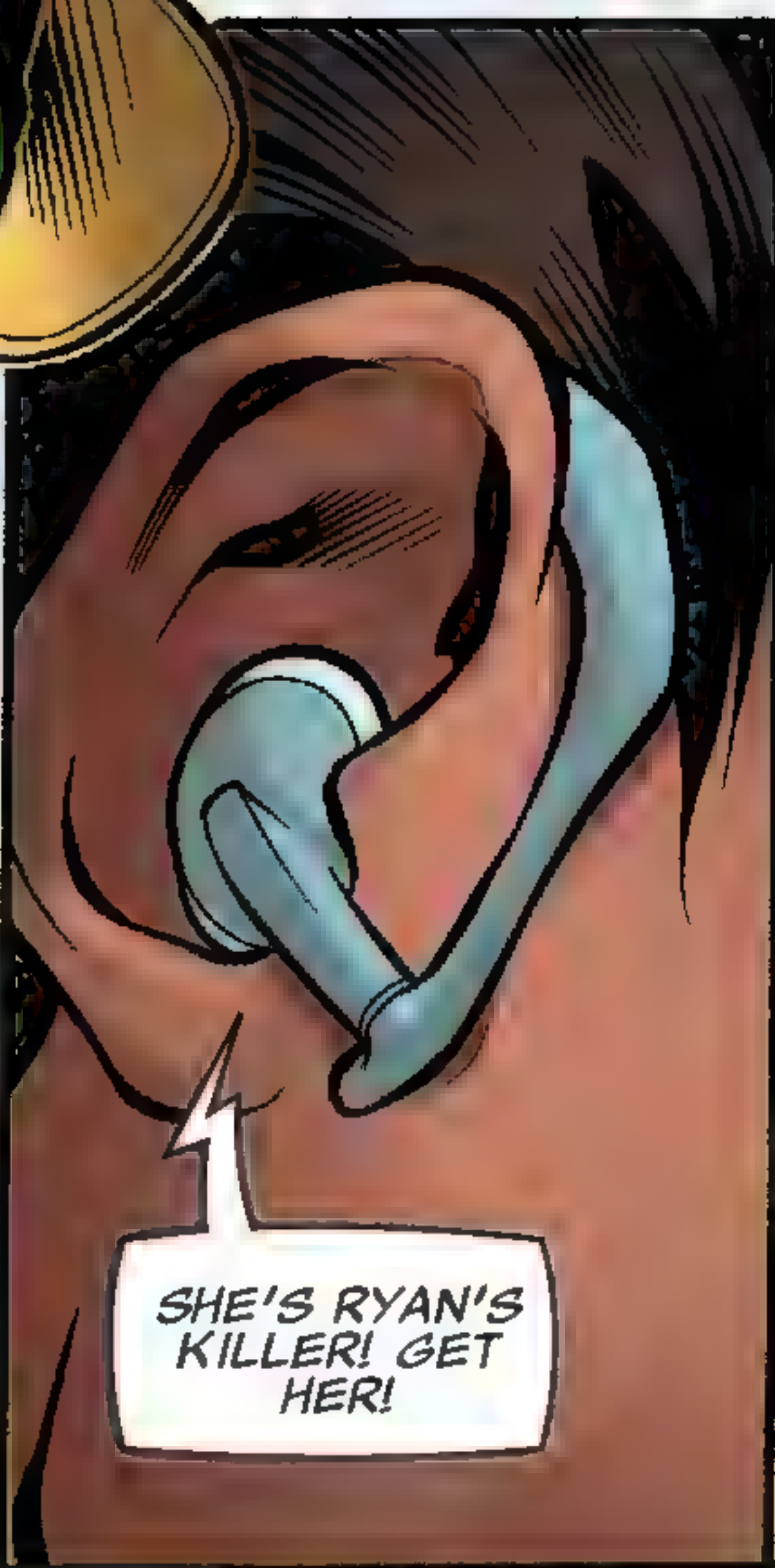
ON BEHALF
OF EVERYONE
WHO VALUES
THE FOUNDATIONS
OF THIS
COUNTRY...



YOU'RE
THE MAN.



WHAT
CAN I SAY?
YOU'RE RIGHT
ON TARGET.

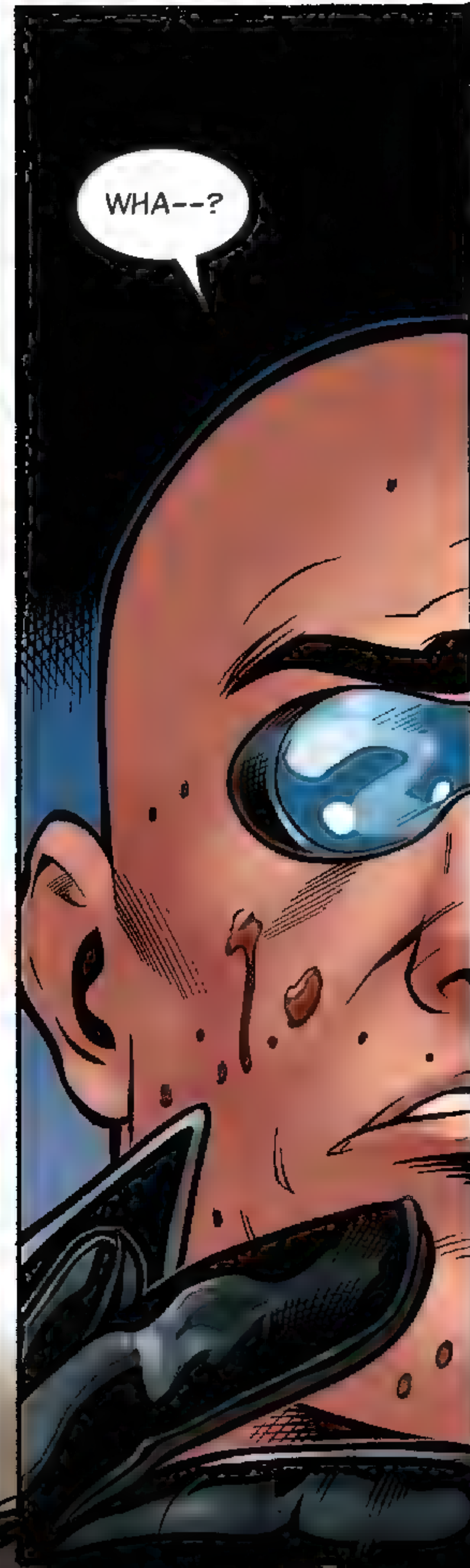




M, FERGIT
'ER! GO GET
JAMESON T'SAFETY!
I'LL TAKE 'ER.
SHE AIN'T EVEN
ARMED--



BLAM



WHA---?



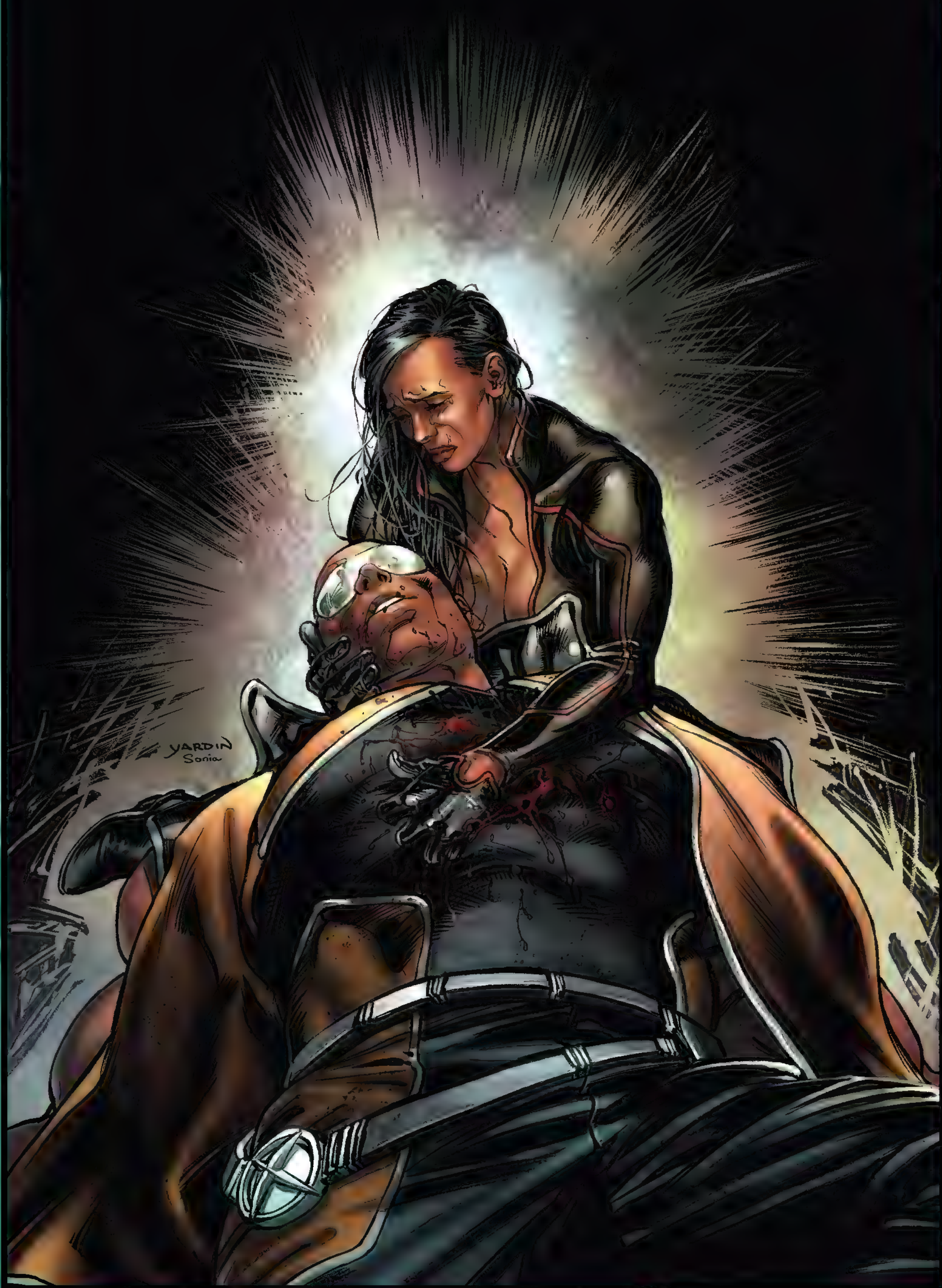
WELL...
THAT AIN'T
RIGHT...

GUIDO!



SYL?
BALLISTIQUE HIT
A SNAG. DON'T
WORRY...

I'M
ON IT.





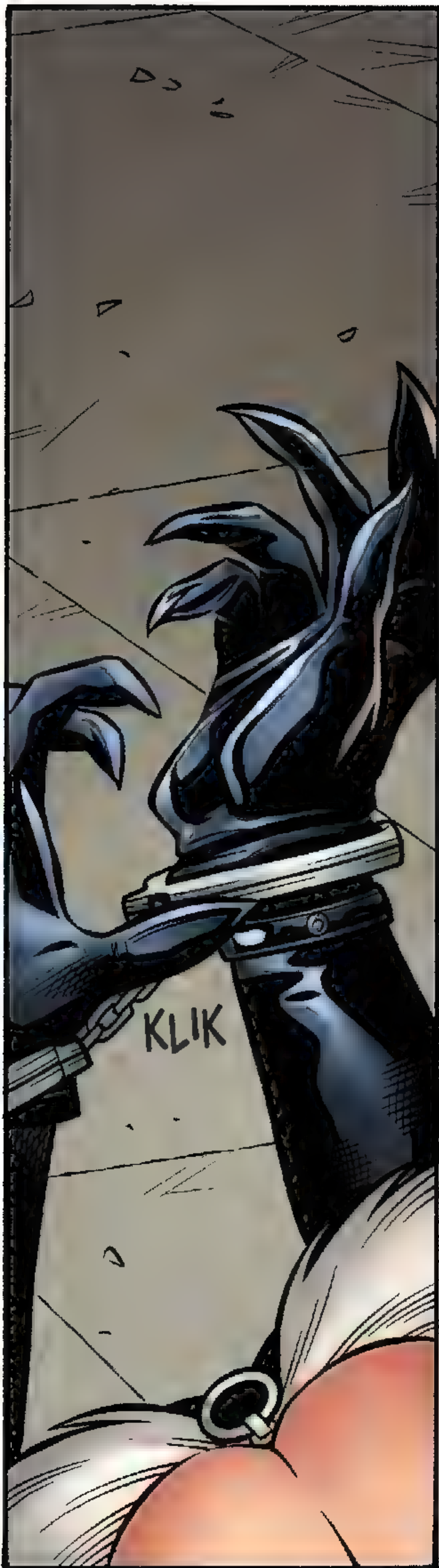
OKAY,
THIS IS
MESSED UP
RIGHT
HERE...

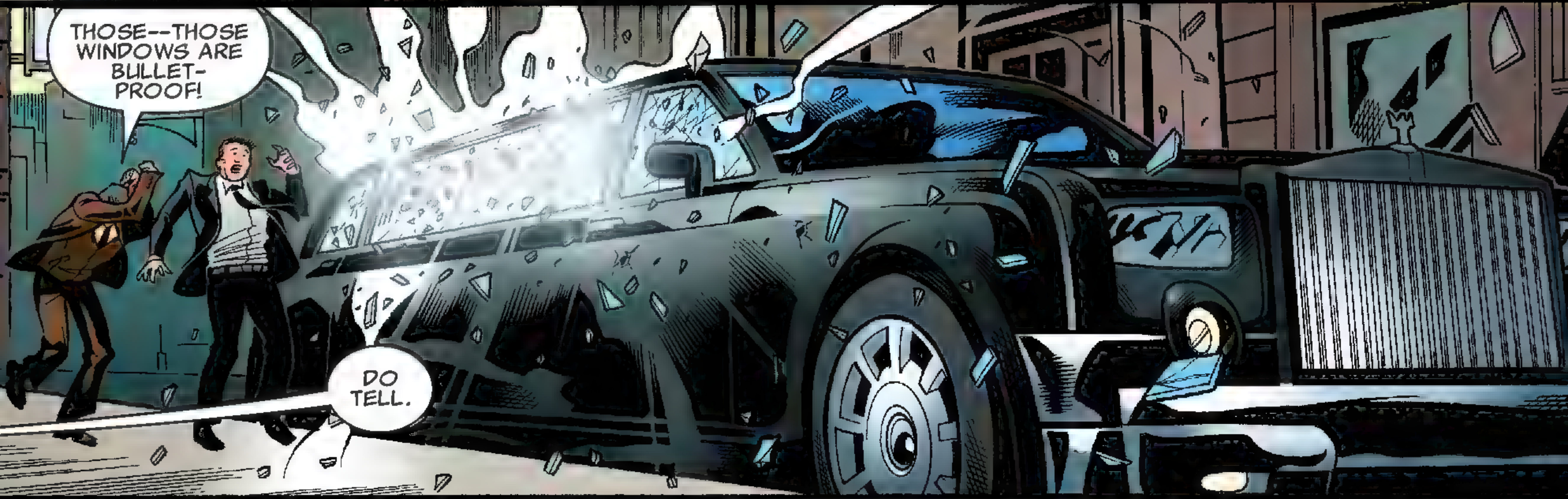
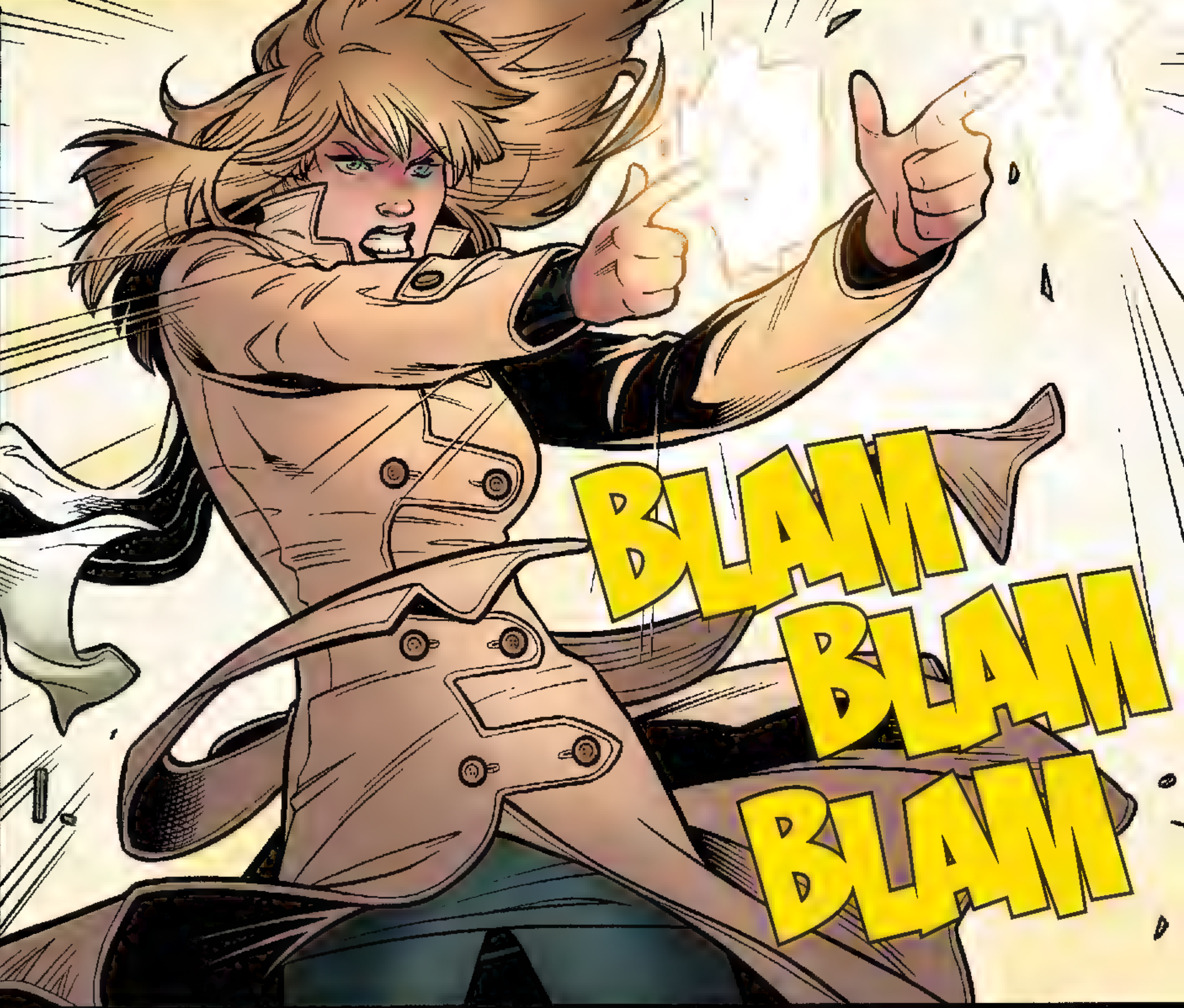
GUIDO---?!

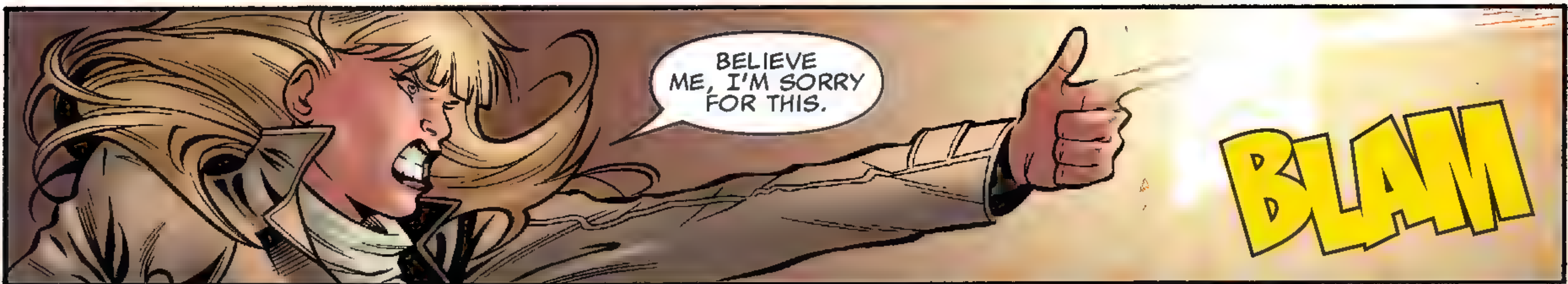
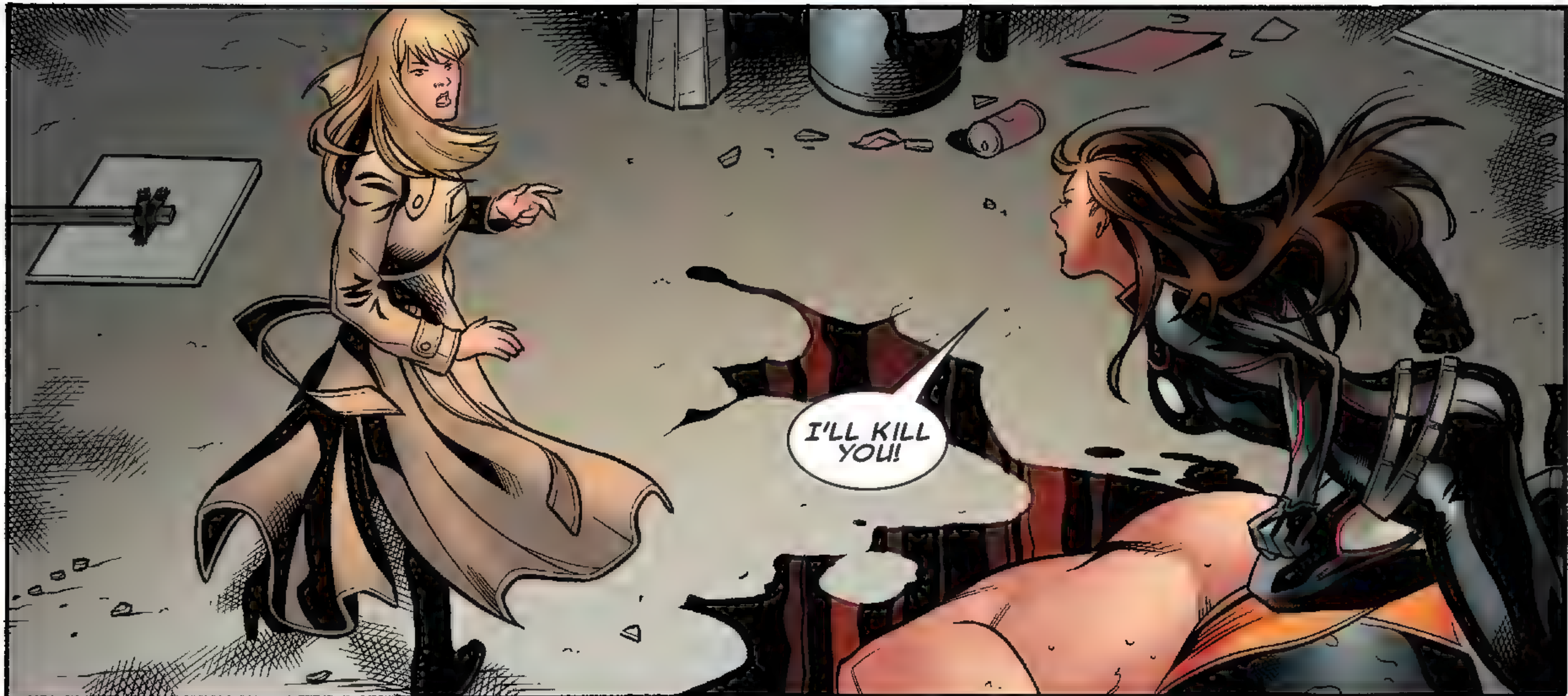
GUIDO,
STAY WITH
ME!

AIN'T IN
SHAPE...T'GO
ANYWHERE...
RIGHT NOW...



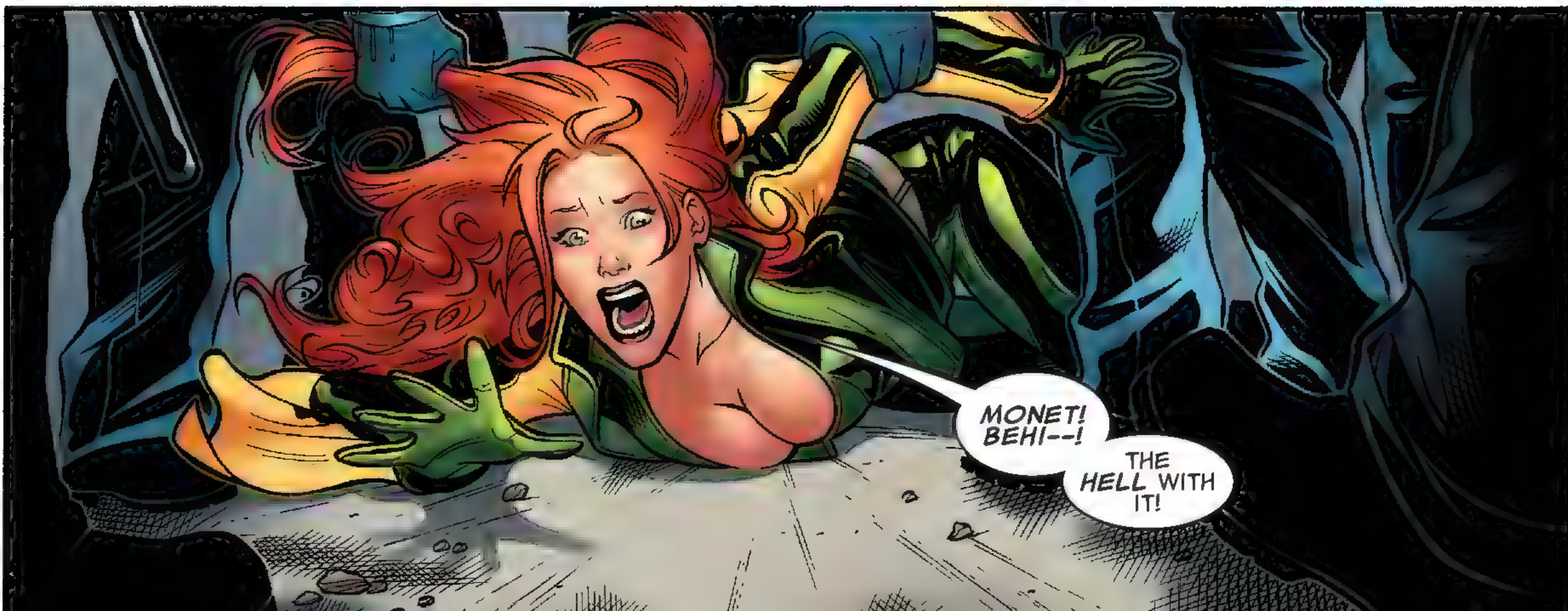
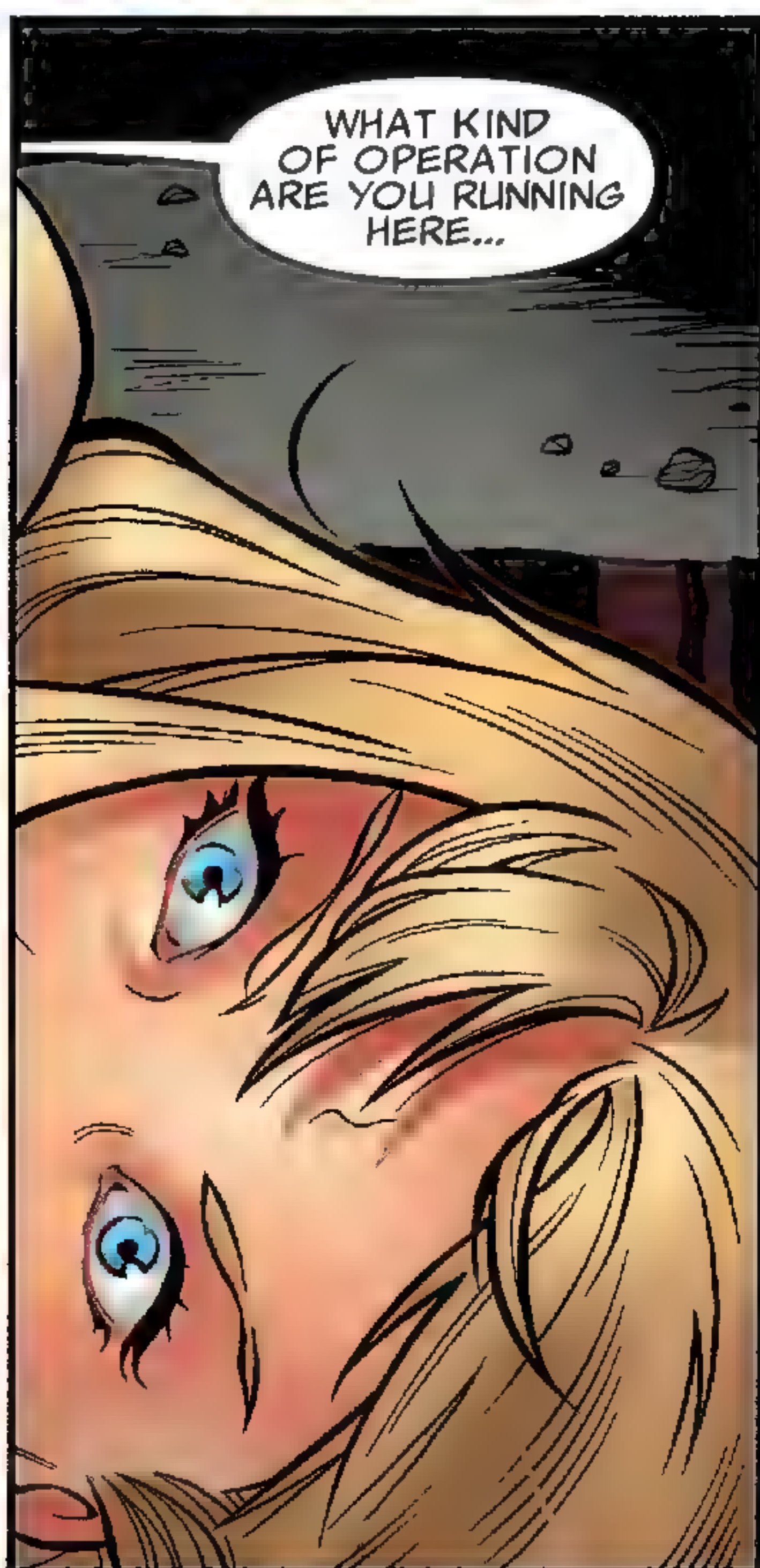
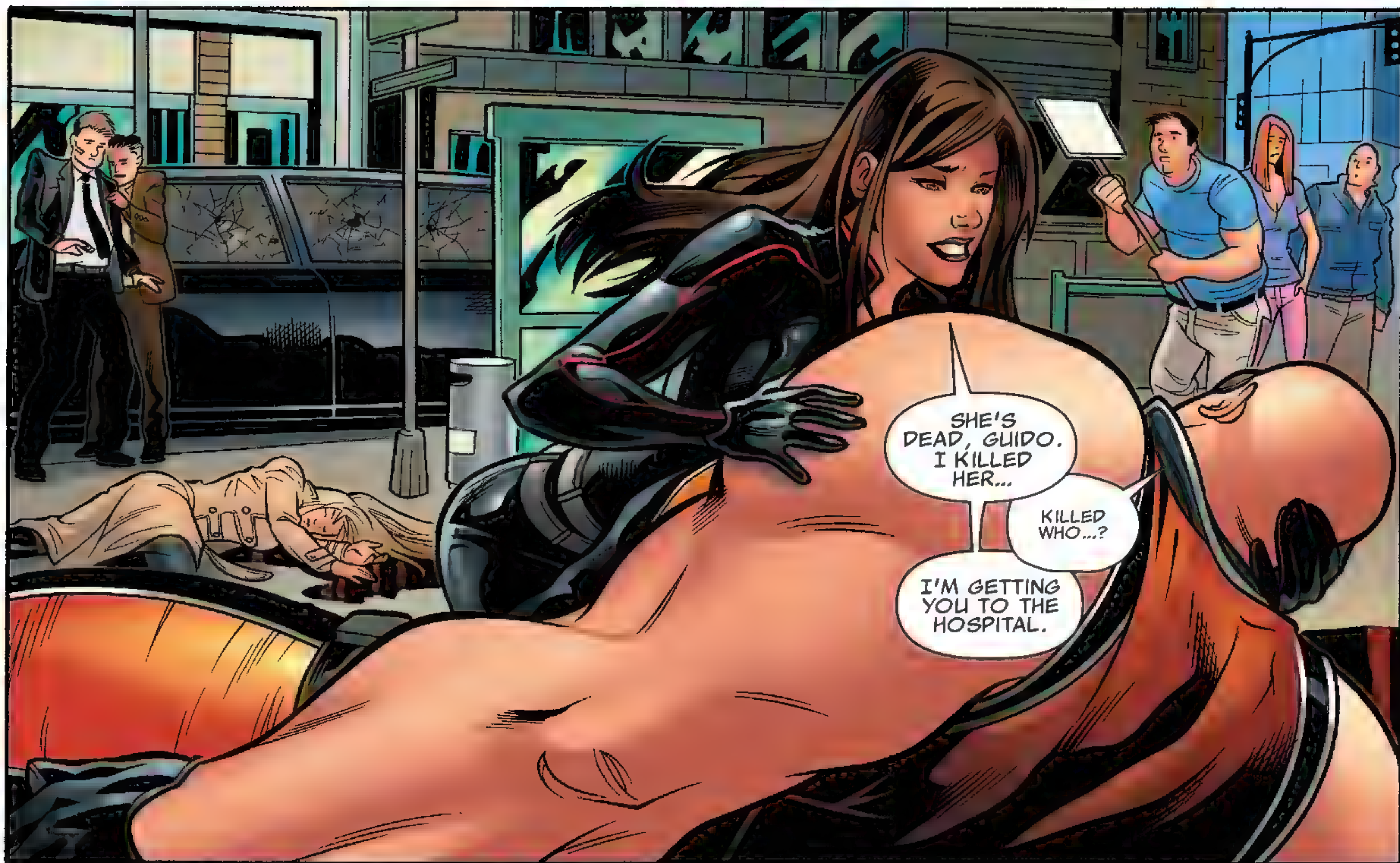


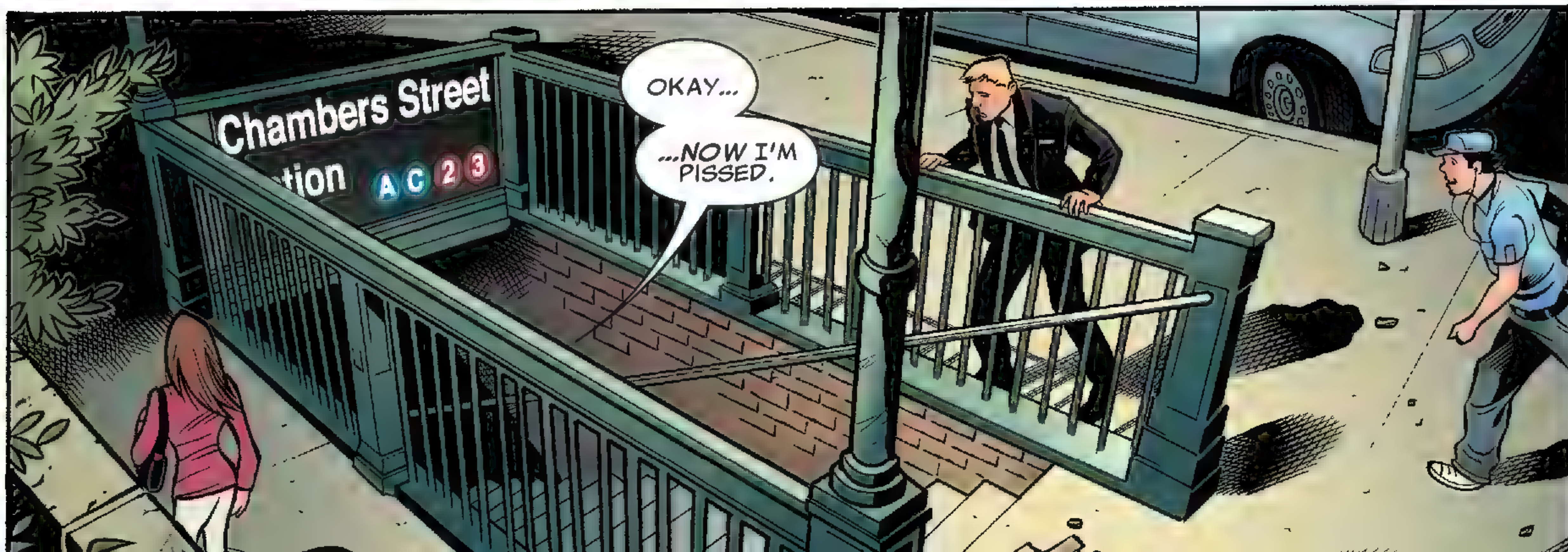
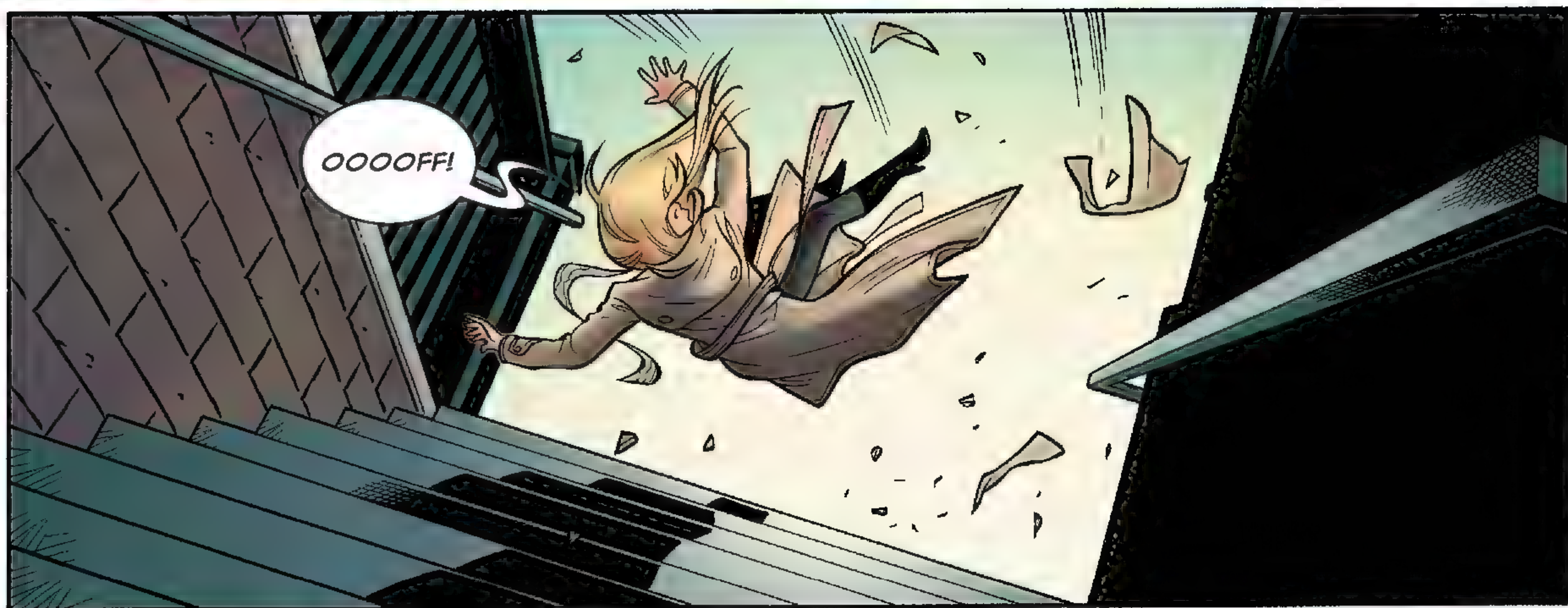
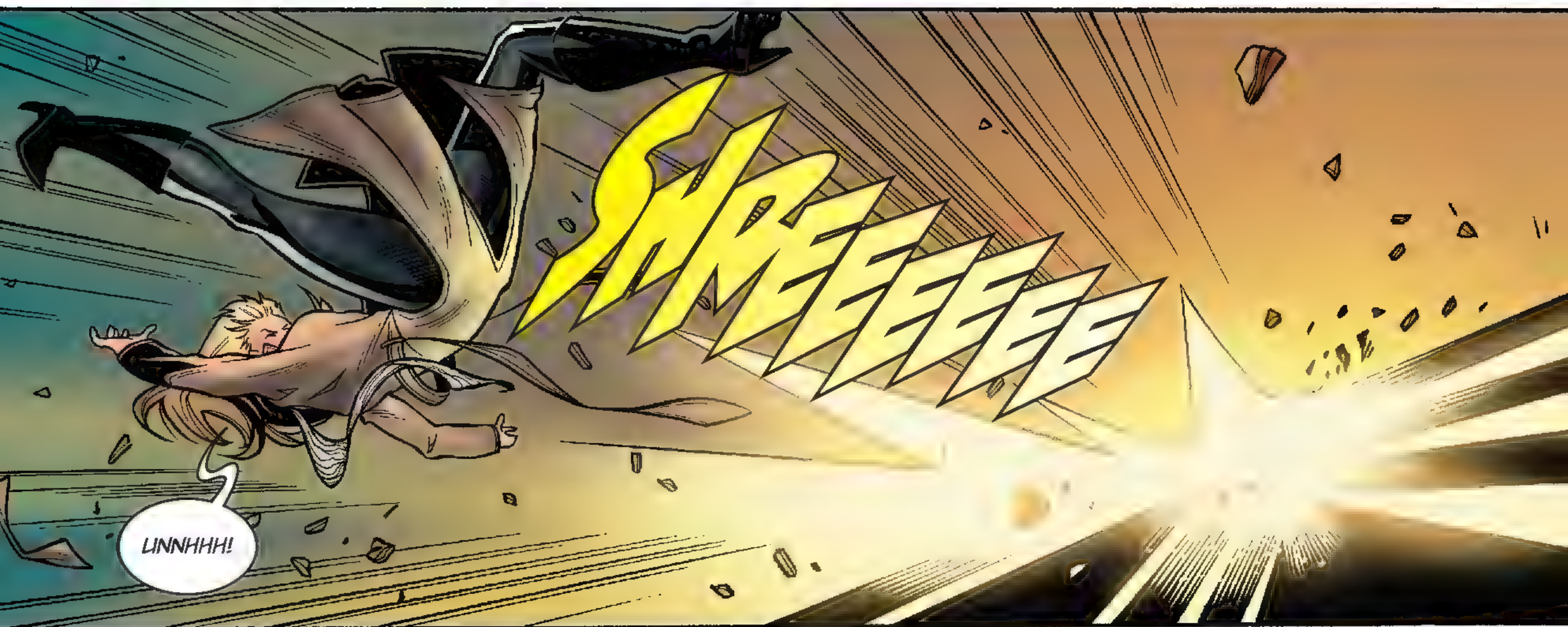






UNNNNNNN!!!!







LET'S SEE
JUST HOW
TOUGH THAT
SKIN OF
YOURS IS.



ROCKY!
ARE YOU
OUT OF
THERE?

TRYING.
A CAT
CROSSED
MY PATH.



SO WHAT
DO YOU
THINK OF MY
LITTLE TASER
CLAWS?

ZZZZZT



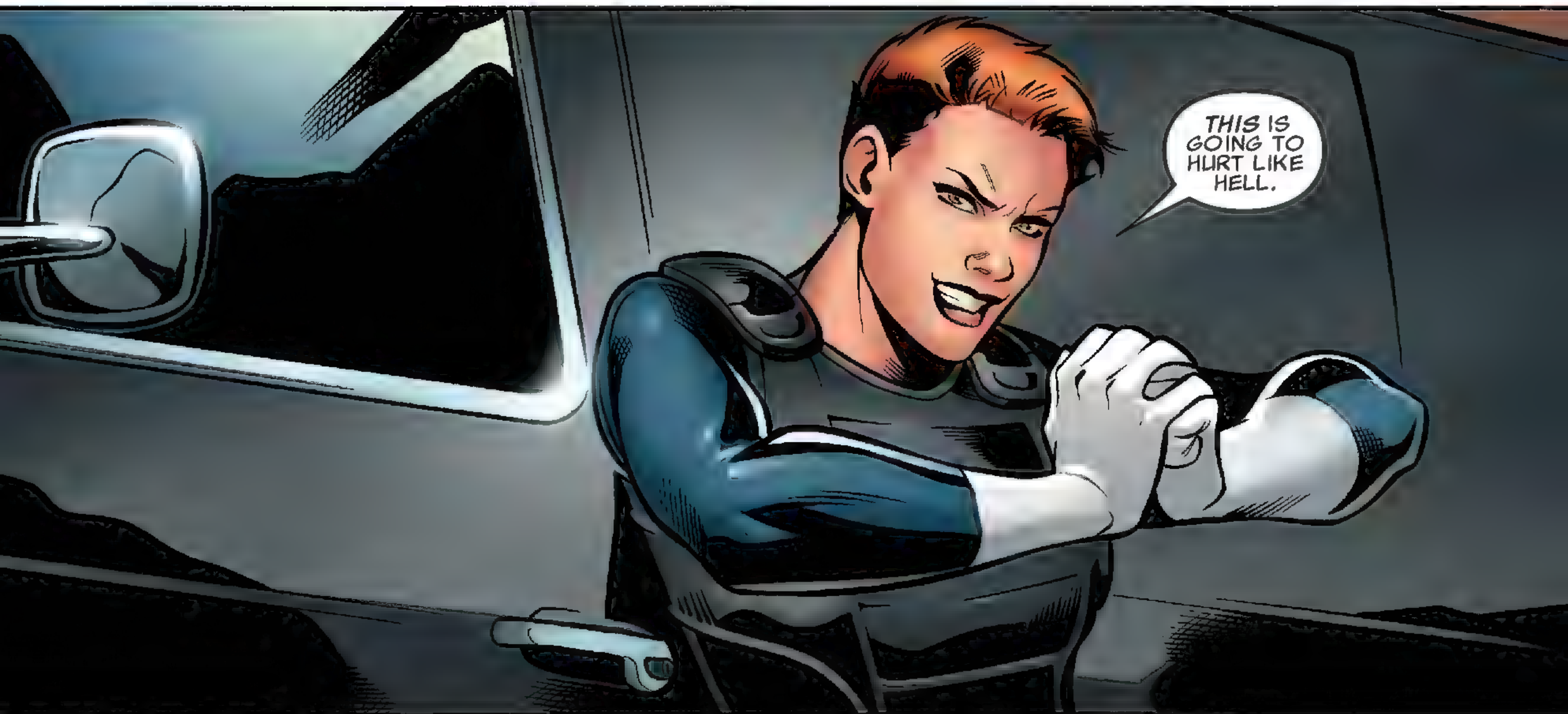
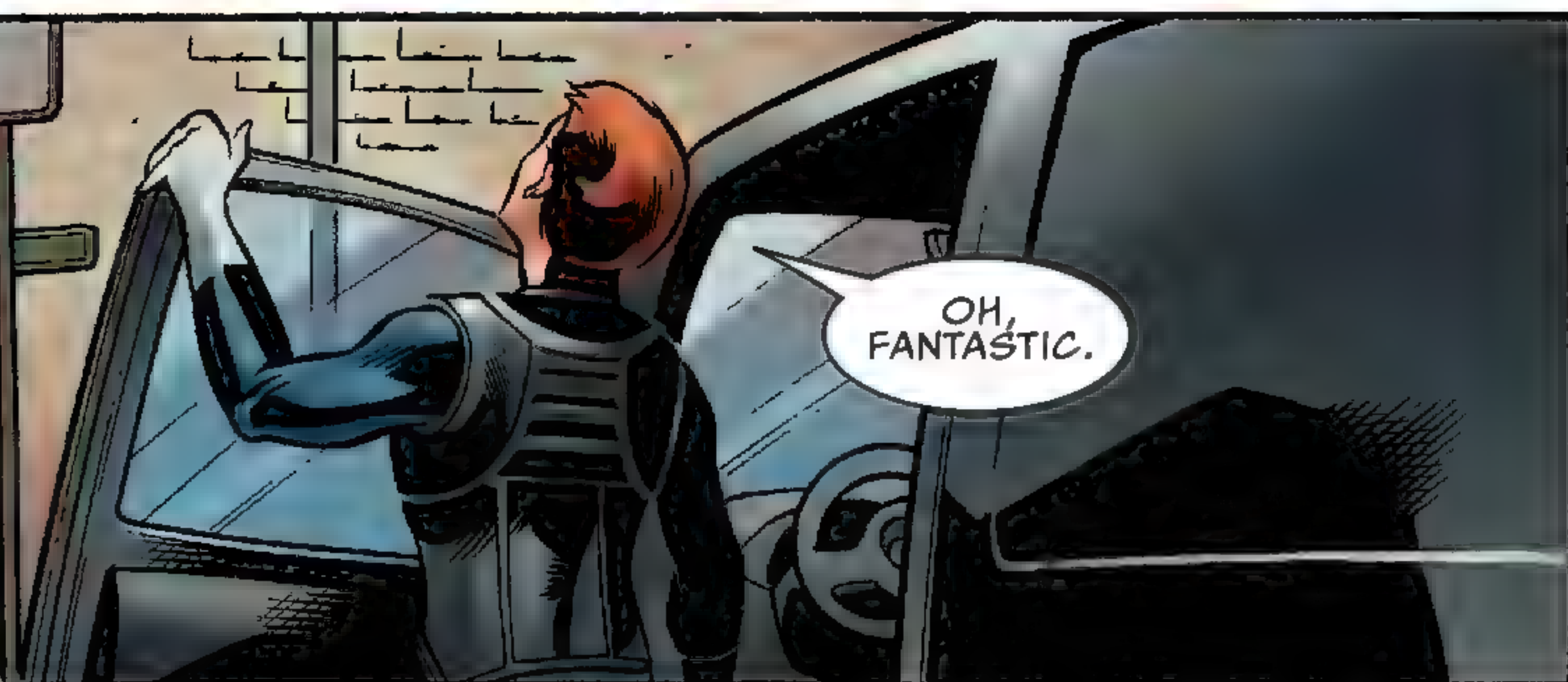
NEEDS
WORK.



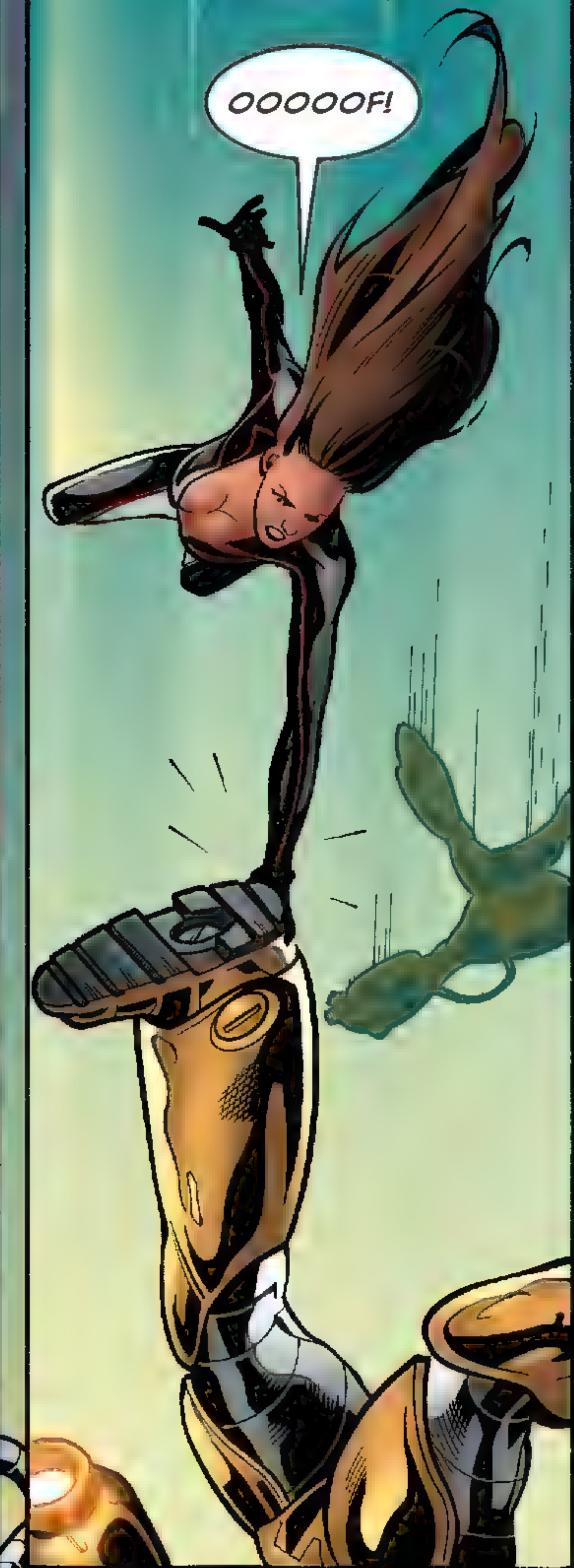
OKAY,
SYL. I'M
OUT OF--



UH-OH.
INCOMING.











GUIDO!



CALL DOCTOR CASTILLO! TELL HER TO MEET US AT ST. VINCENT'S!

I'M ON IT. AND MONET-- THAT WOMAN! SHE'S THE ONE WHO KILLED RYAN! MADROX HAS A POSITIVE I.D.!



NOW SEE HERE, YOUNG LADY! YOU HAVE A JOB TO FINISH HERE BEFORE YOU--



TO HELL WITH THE JOB AND TO HELL WITH YOU!

THERE'S SOMETHING GOING ON YOU'RE NOT TELLING US...

...AND SO HELP ME GOD, WHEN I COME BACK...



I'M GOING TO RIP IT OUT OF YOUR MIND!

TOLD'JA THEY WERE TERRORISTS.



YOU CARRYIN' ME...THE GUYS IN THE OLD NEIGHBORHOOD... THEY'D BE LAUGHING THEIR ASSES OFF...

JUST HANG ON, GUIDO. IT'LL BE FINE, I PROMISE...



DON'T BE MAKING... PROMISES... YA CAN'T KEEP...

NEVER HAD...THE WORLD'S BEST TICKER...

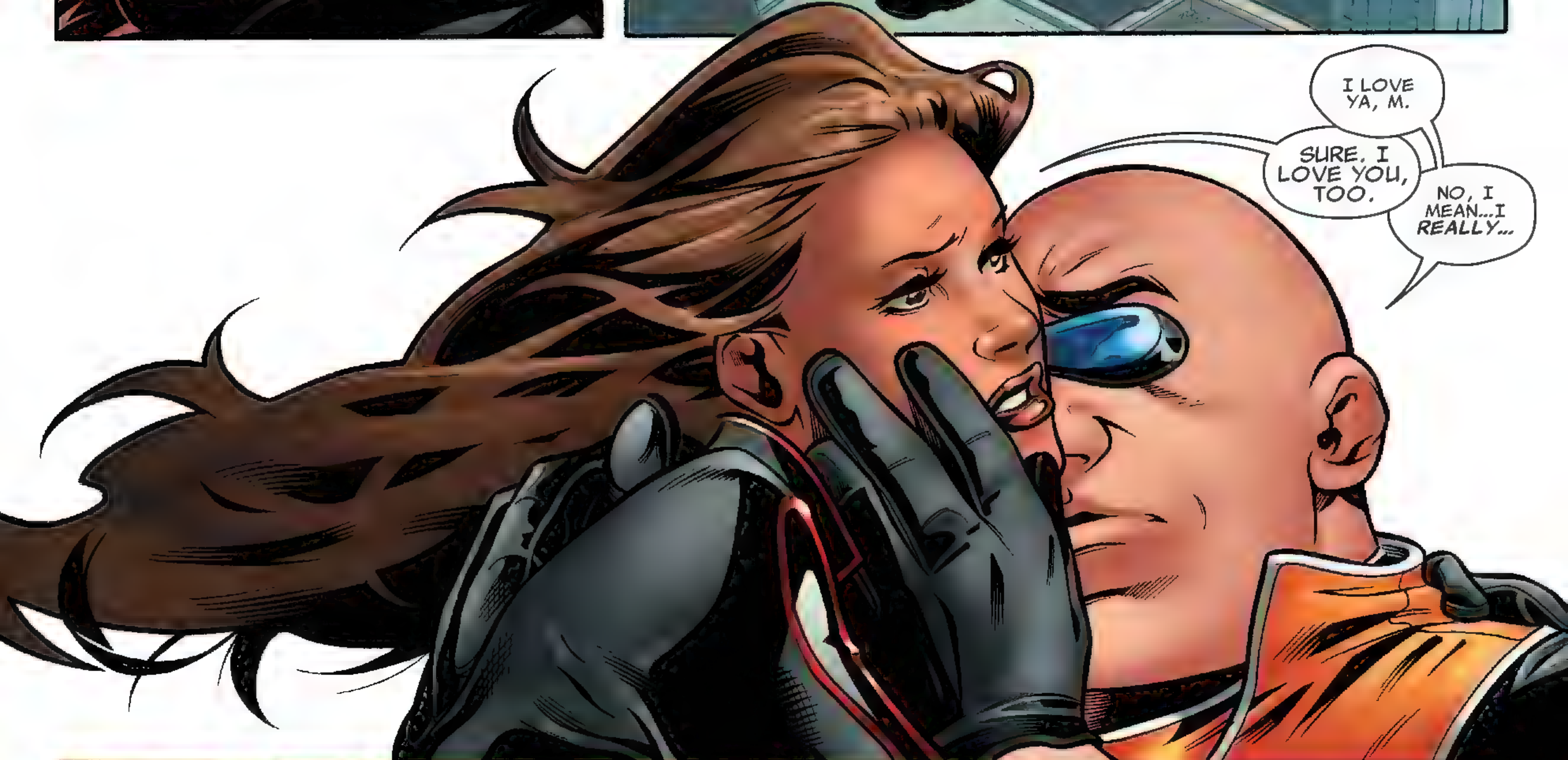
ALTHOUGH... WHEN ALL'S SAID AND DONE...MEBBE I SHOULDN'A GOTTEN THAT HAIRCUT...

YEAH...THAT WAS THE MISTAKE...



YOUR MISTAKE IS THAT YOU'RE NOT SAVING YOUR STRENGTH.

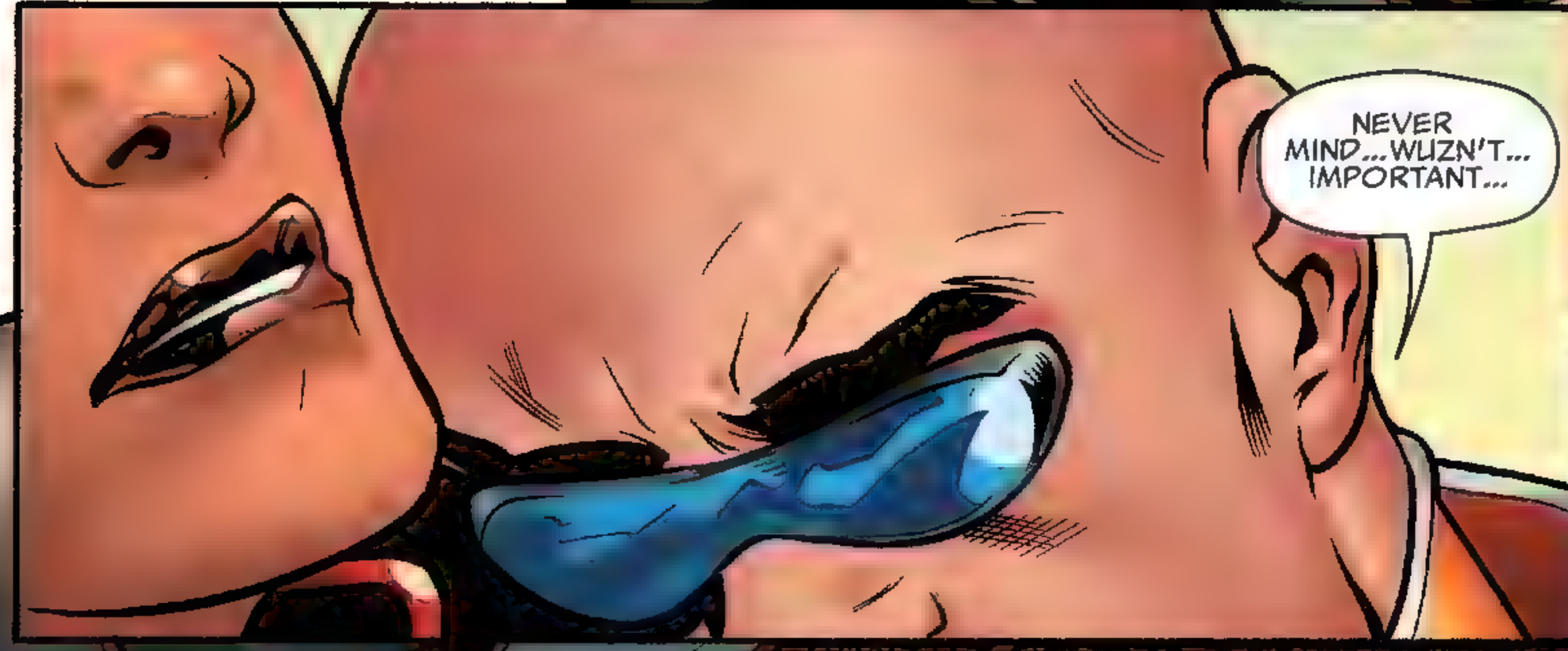
JUST HAVE STRENGTH ENOUGH...FER THIS...



I LOVE YA, M.

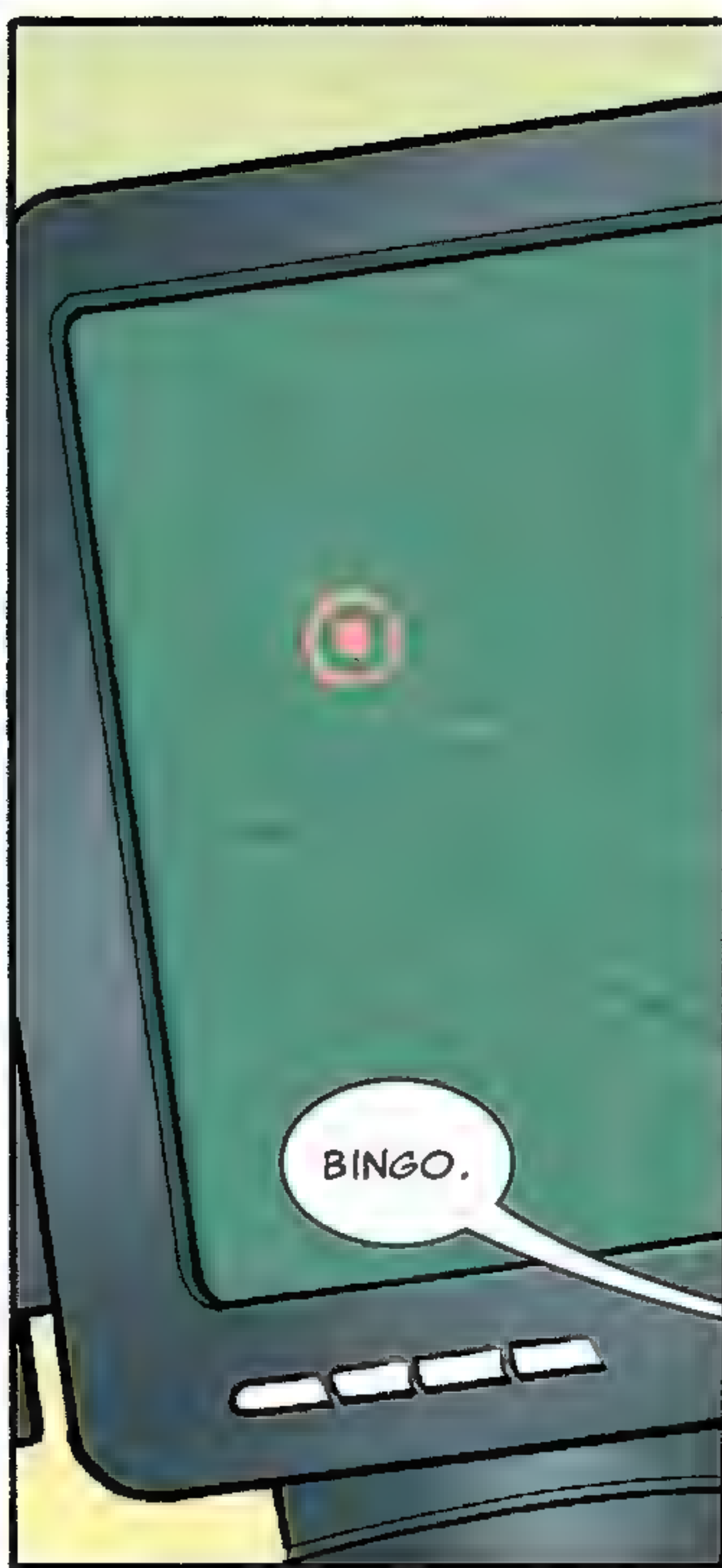
SURE. I LOVE YOU, TOO.

NO, I MEAN...I REALLY...



NEVER MIND...WUZN'T... IMPORTANT...







ALL RIGHT. THAT WAS PRODUCTIVE.



WE HAVE A VISUAL OF THE WOMAN WHO KILLED JAMESON'S BUDDY. NOW IT'S JUST A MATTER OF FINDING HER.

RICTOR... THINK YOU CAN TAP THE F.B.I.'S DATABASE?

I DUNNO, MADROX, IT'S PRETTY SECURE. COULD TAKE ME A WHOLE TEN MINUTES.



HOW CAN SUCH IMPORTANT MATERIAL BE SO EASILY ACCESSED?

THERE WAS A SOLDIER IN VIETNAM WHO, EVERY NIGHT, WOULD INSERT EACH BULLET HE HAD, ONE BY ONE, INTO HIS RIFLE.

WHEN ASKED WHY, HE SAID, "'CAUSE GOVERNMENT S.O.P. MEANS THESE WERE MADE BY THE LOWEST BIDDER. I WANNA MAKE SURE THEY FIT."



YOUR POINT BEING...?

THE FEDS GET WHAT THEY PAY FOR.



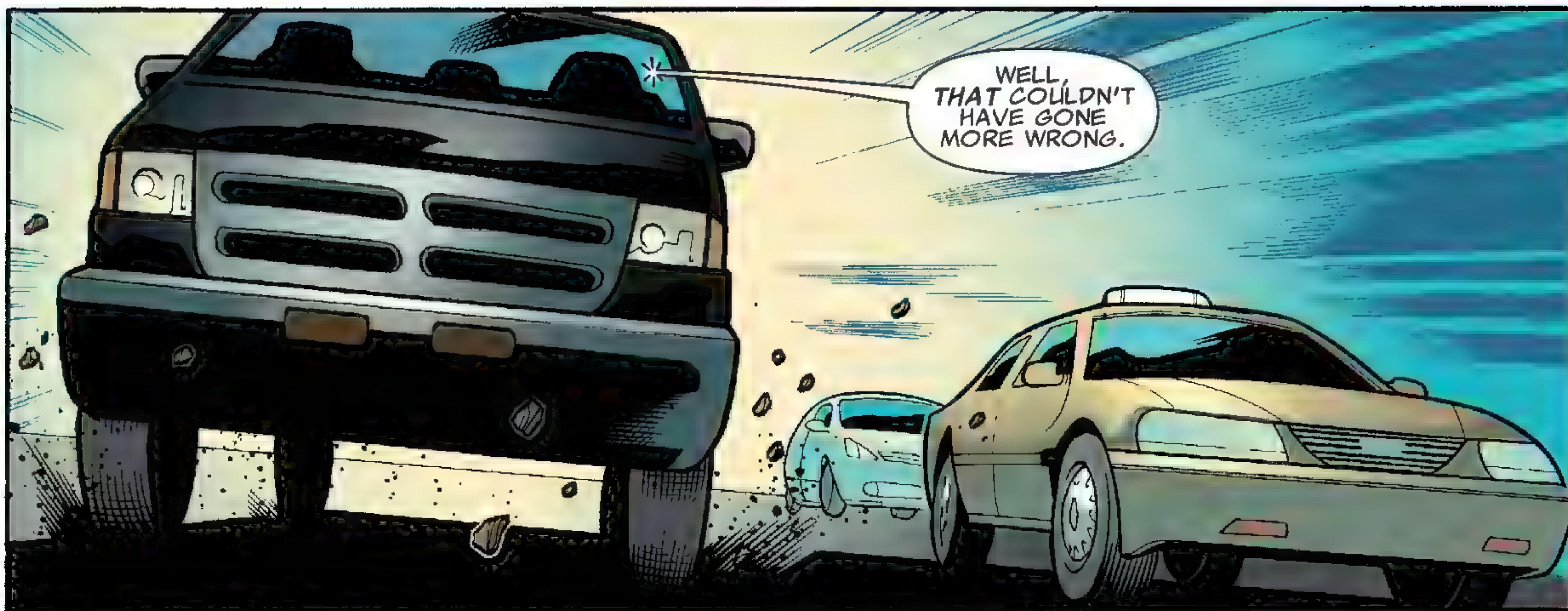
RAHNE? WHAT'S WRONG--?

IS IT THE BABY? ARE YOU...?

NO, IT'S...



IT'S GUIDO.



WELL,
THAT COULDN'T
HAVE GONE
MORE WRONG.



DON'T GET DOWN
ON YOURSELF,
NOELLE, YOU'RE
RUSTY, IS ALL.

SHE'S
NOT THE ONLY
ONE.

I CAN'T
BELIEVE I LET
THAT PLATINUM
BLONDE THROW
ME OFF MY
GAME.



SEE,
WHAT I
CAN'T BELIEVE
IS THAT YOU
LET HER GET A
TRACER ON
YOU.



WHAT?
WHAT ARE
YOU--?

I CAN
SENSE THE
PULSE COMING
OFF YOU. NOELLE,
RUN A DEBUGGER
OVER HER.

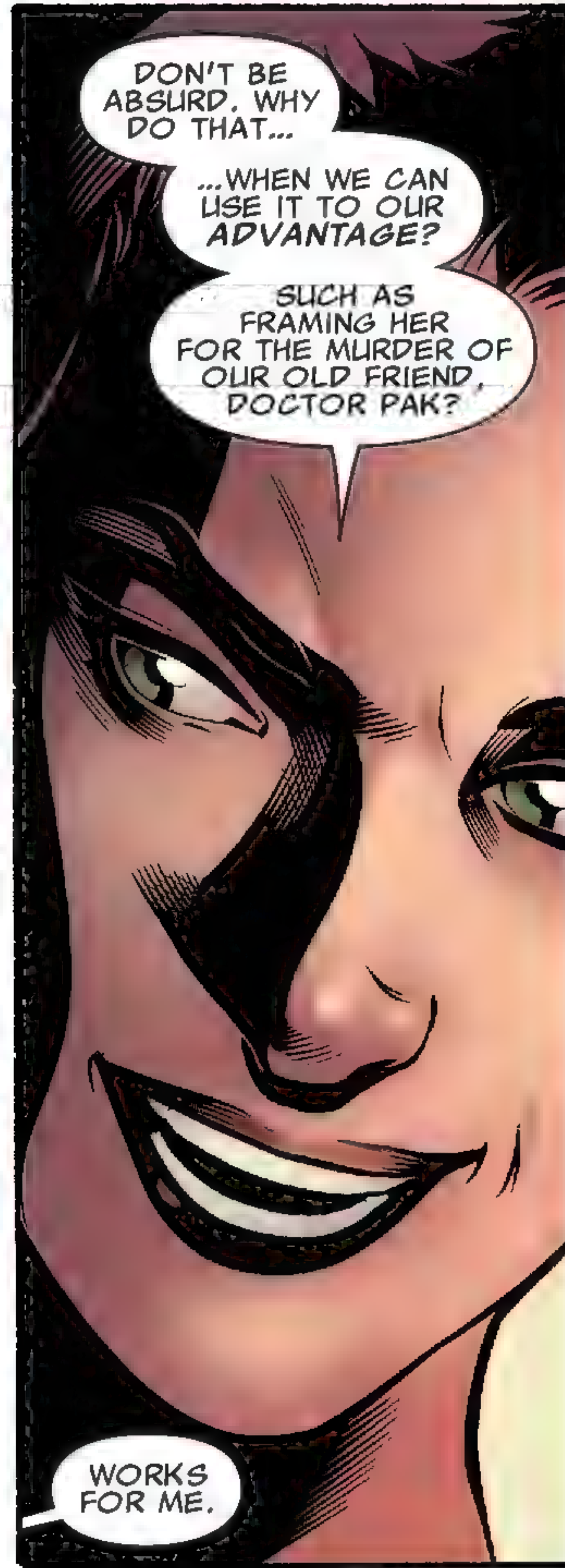


SON
OF A--

SHE'S
RIGHT.

THAT LITTLE
FLOOZY! IT
MUST HAVE BEEN
BUILT INTO HER
CLAWS WHEN
SHE--

QUICK!
DESTROY
IT!

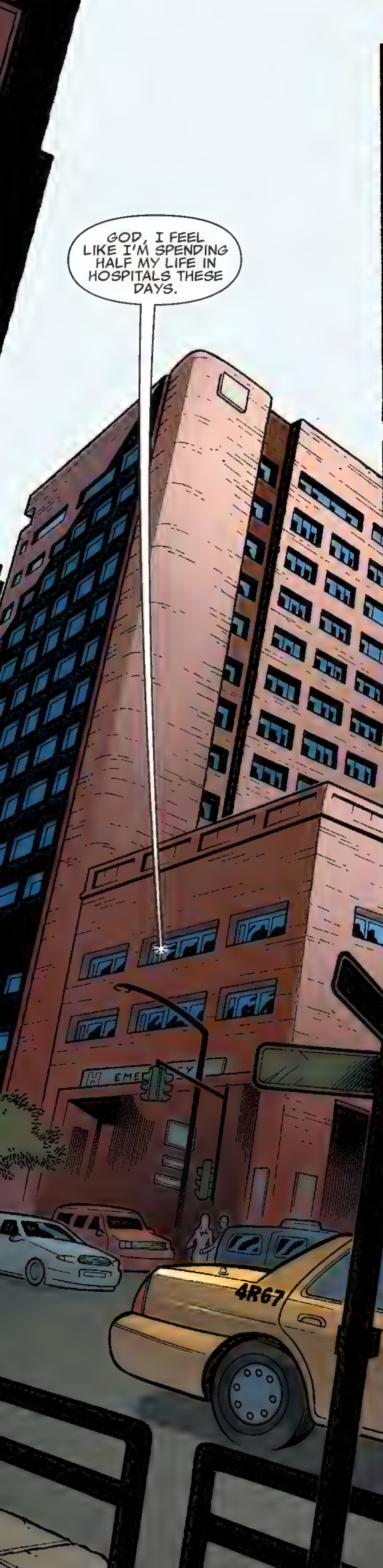


DON'T BE
ABSRD. WHY
DO THAT...

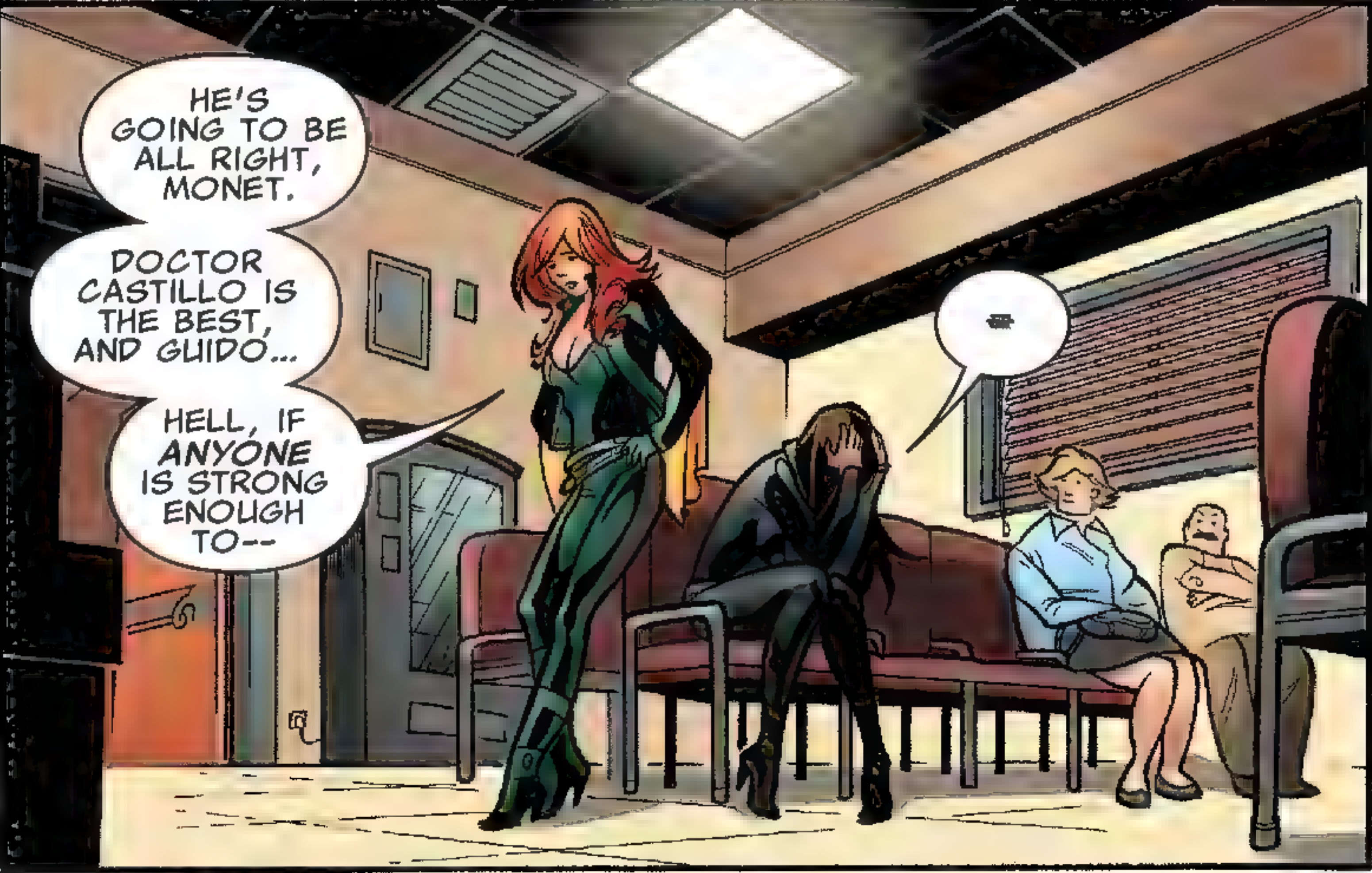
...WHEN WE CAN
USE IT TO OUR
ADVANTAGE?

SUCH AS
FRAMING HER
FOR THE MURDER OF
OUR OLD FRIEND,
DOCTOR PAK?

WORKS
FOR ME.



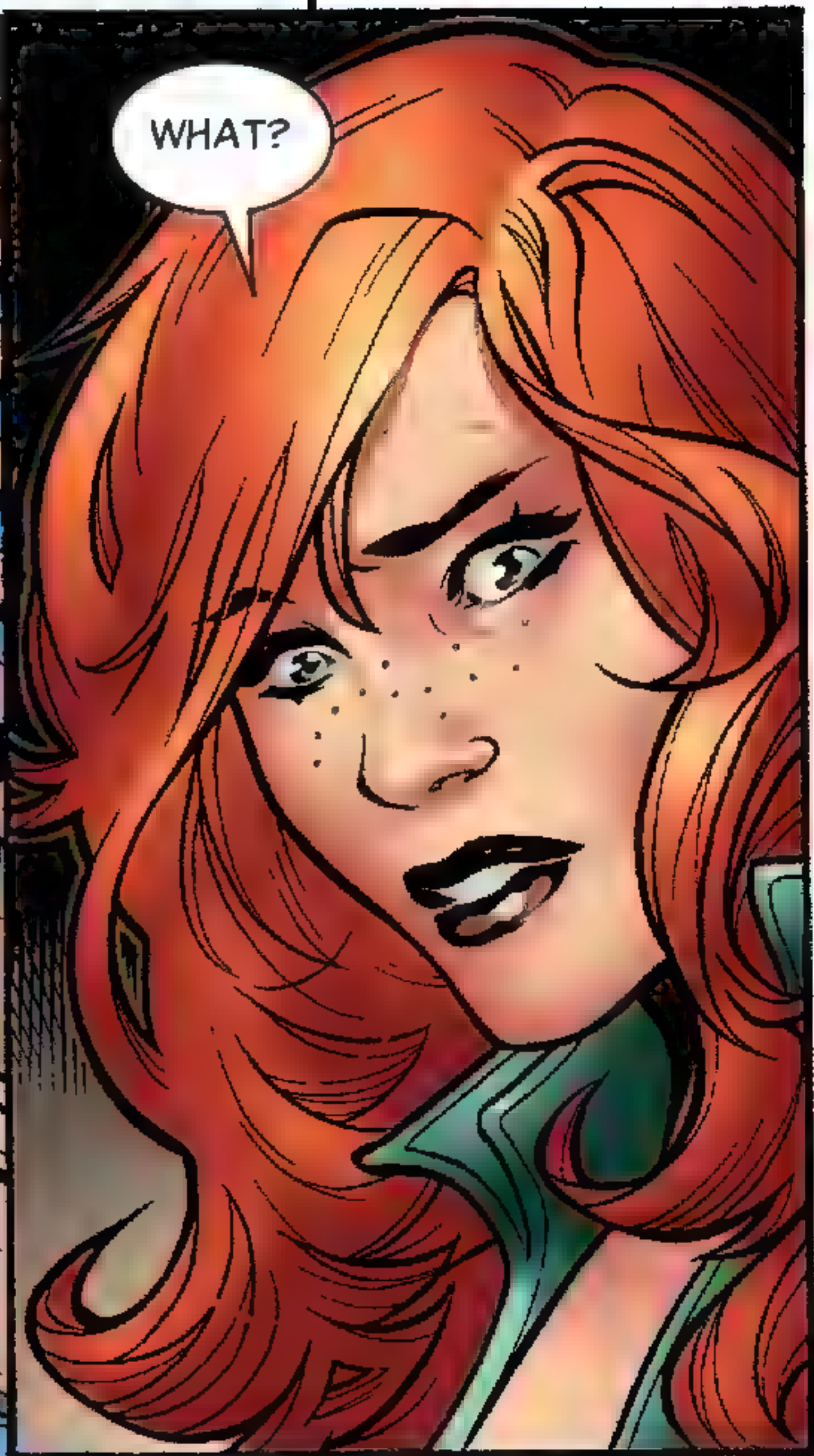
GOD, I FEEL LIKE I'M SPENDING HALF MY LIFE IN HOSPITALS THESE DAYS.



HE'S GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT, MONET.

DOCTOR CASTILLO IS THE BEST, AND GUIDO...

HELL, IF ANYONE IS STRONG ENOUGH TO--



WHAT?



IT'S MY FAULT.

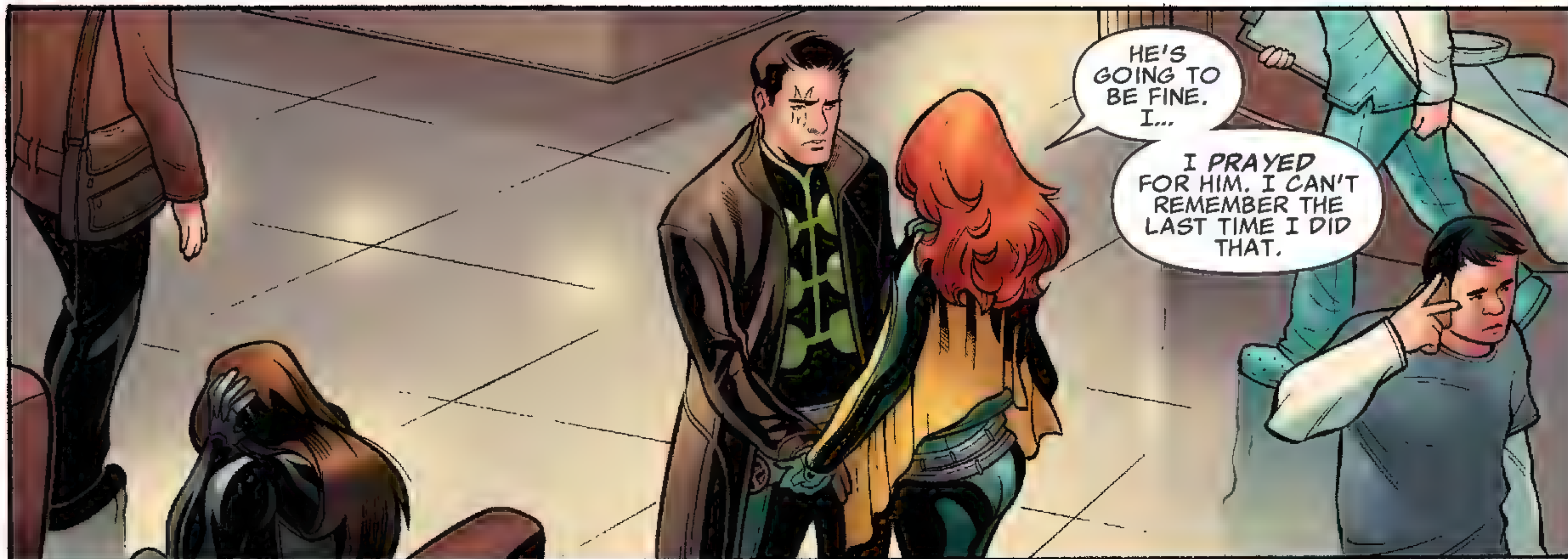


MONET... IT WAS A FIGHT. THINGS GO WRONG. YOU CAN'T--

NO, YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND. THAT WOMAN... I--

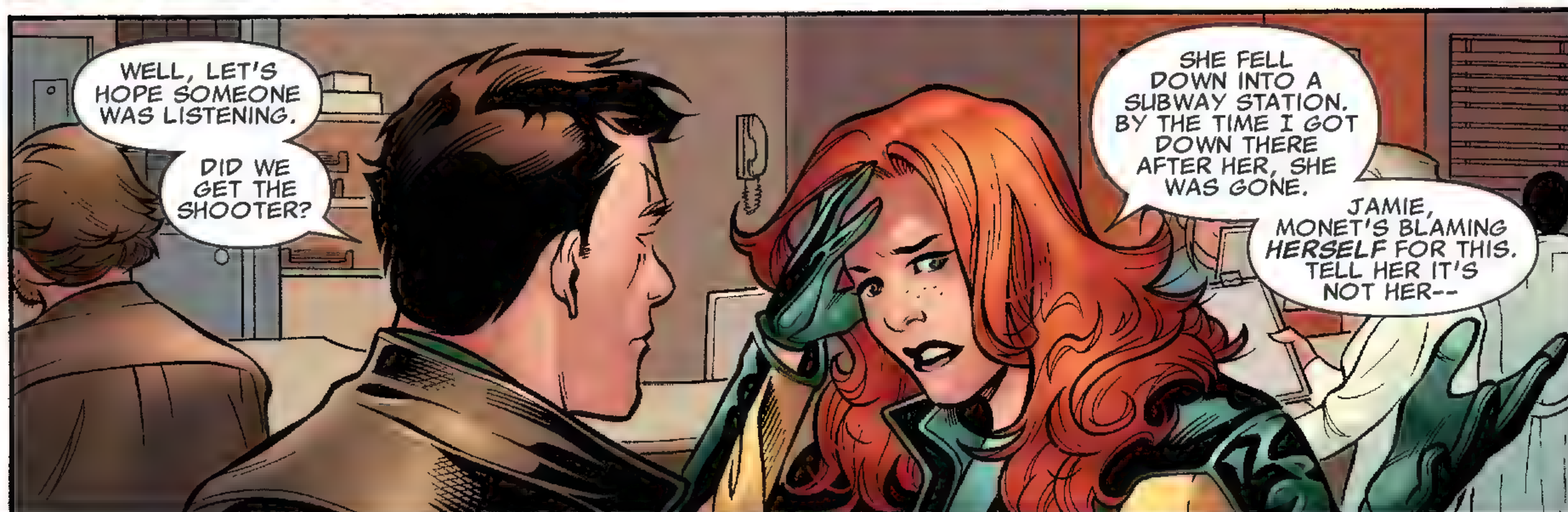


HOW IS HE?



HE'S GOING TO BE FINE. I...

I PRAYED FOR HIM. I CAN'T REMEMBER THE LAST TIME I DID THAT.

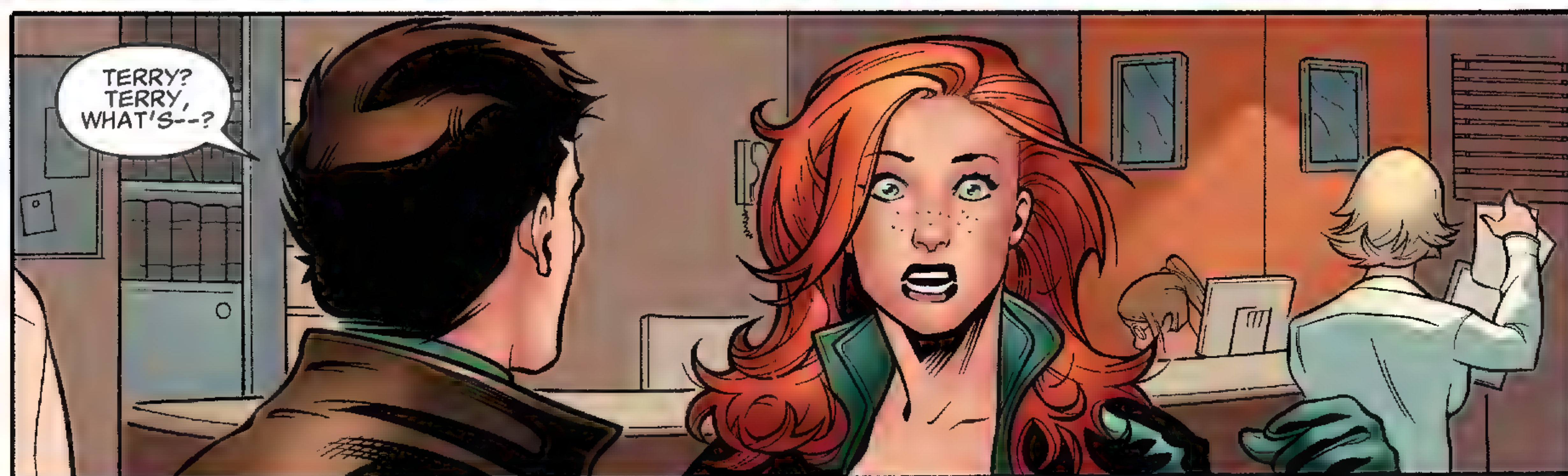


WELL, LET'S HOPE SOMEONE WAS LISTENING.

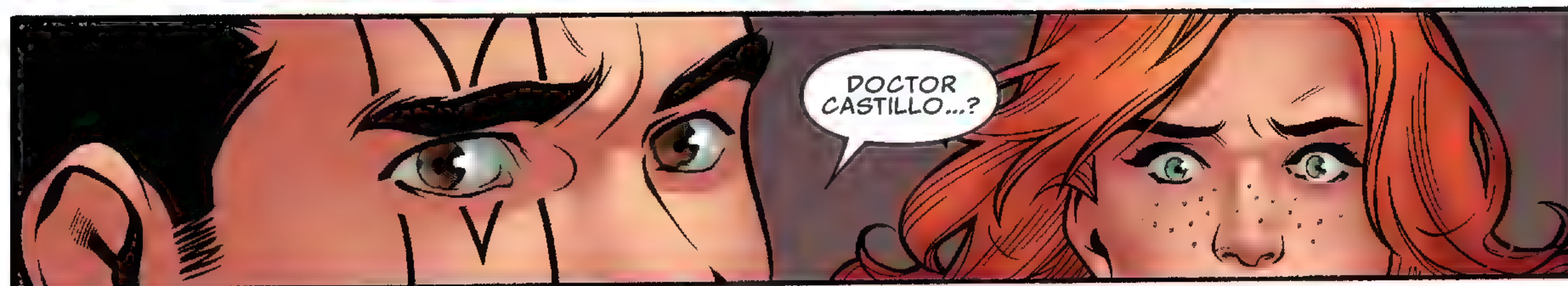
DID WE GET THE SHOOTER?

SHE FELL DOWN INTO A SUBWAY STATION. BY THE TIME I GOT DOWN THERE AFTER HER, SHE WAS GONE.

JAMIE, MONET'S BLAMING HERSELF FOR THIS. TELL HER IT'S NOT HER--



TERRY? TERRY, WHAT'S--?



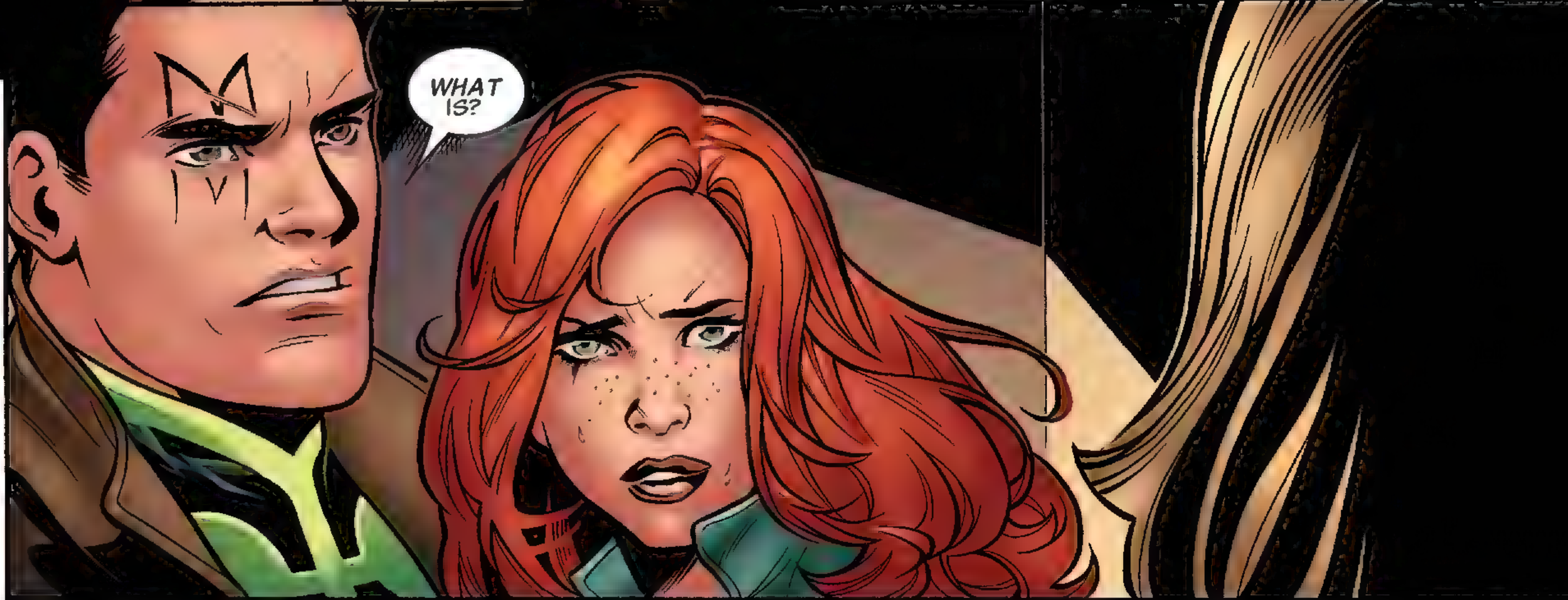
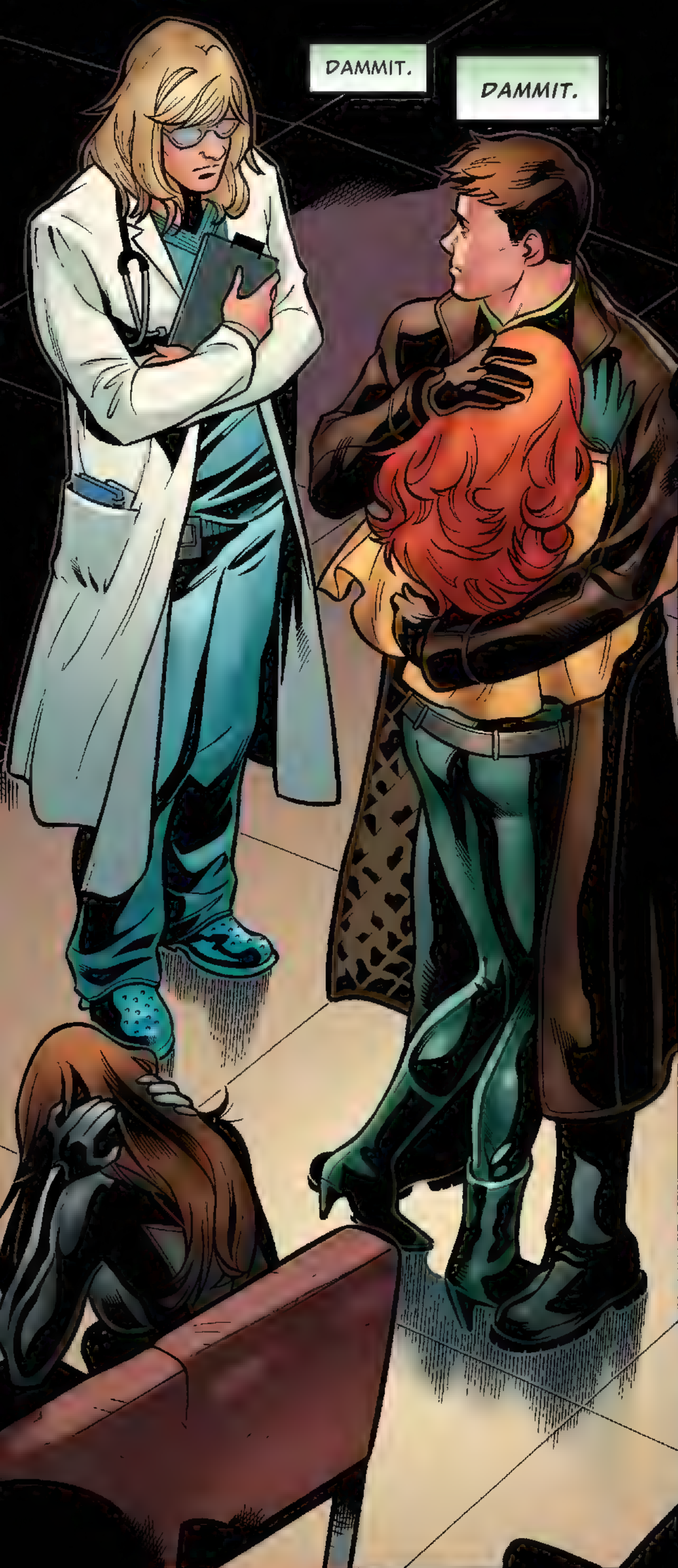
DOCTOR CASTILLO...?

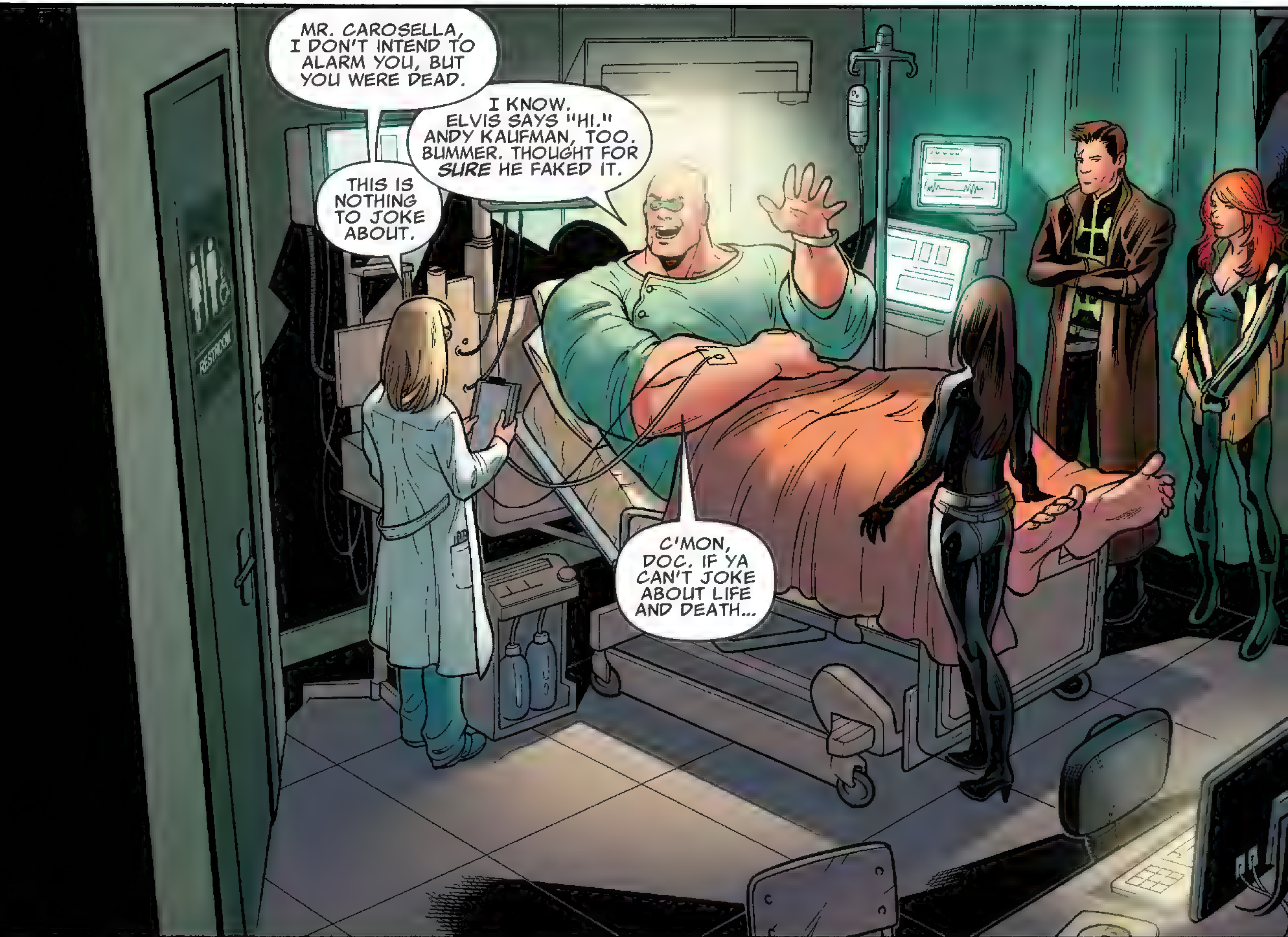


I'M SORRY.

WE DID EVERYTHING WE COULD. THE DAMAGE...AND HIS HEART, IT WAS JUST...

I'M SO SORRY.



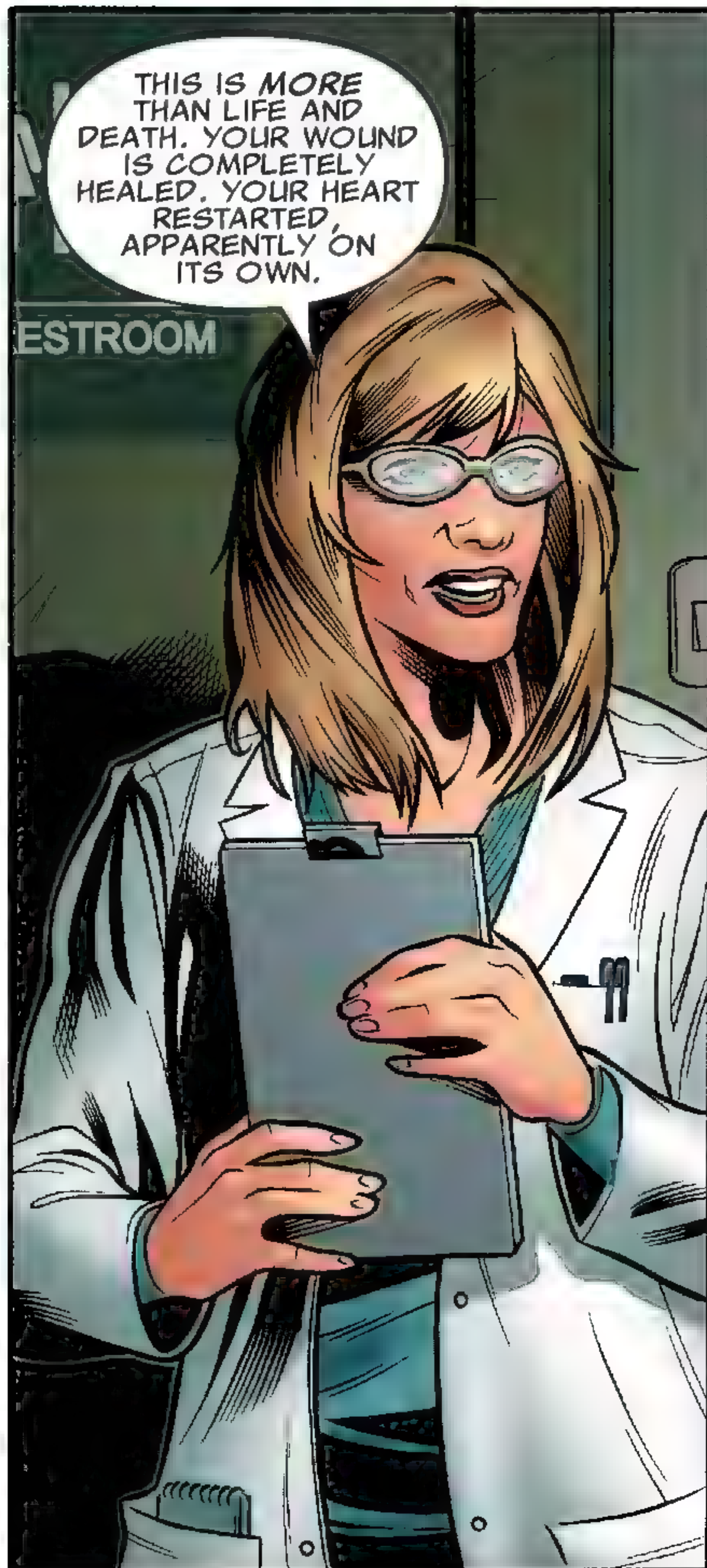


MR. CAROSELLA,
I DON'T INTEND TO
ALARM YOU, BUT
YOU WERE DEAD.

I KNOW.
ELVIS SAYS "HI."
ANDY KAUFMAN, TOO.
BUMMER. THOUGHT FOR
SURE HE FAKED IT.

THIS IS
NOTHING
TO JOKE
ABOUT.

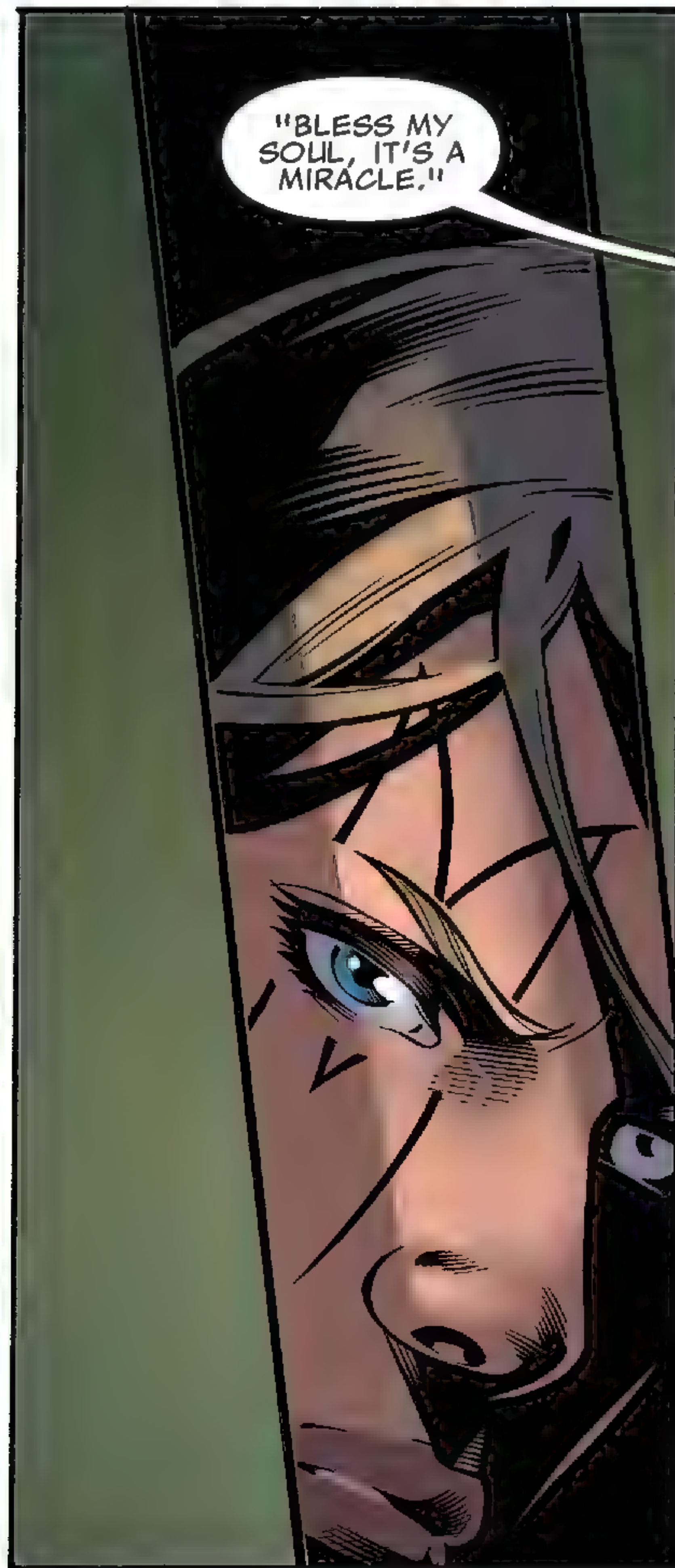
C'MON,
DOC. IF YA
CAN'T JOKE
ABOUT LIFE
AND DEATH...



THIS IS MORE
THAN LIFE AND
DEATH. YOUR WOUND
IS COMPLETELY
HEALED. YOUR HEART
RESTARTED,
APPARENTLY ON
ITS OWN.



WHAT CAN I
TELL YA, DOC...?
LIKE MY MOM
USED TO SAY...



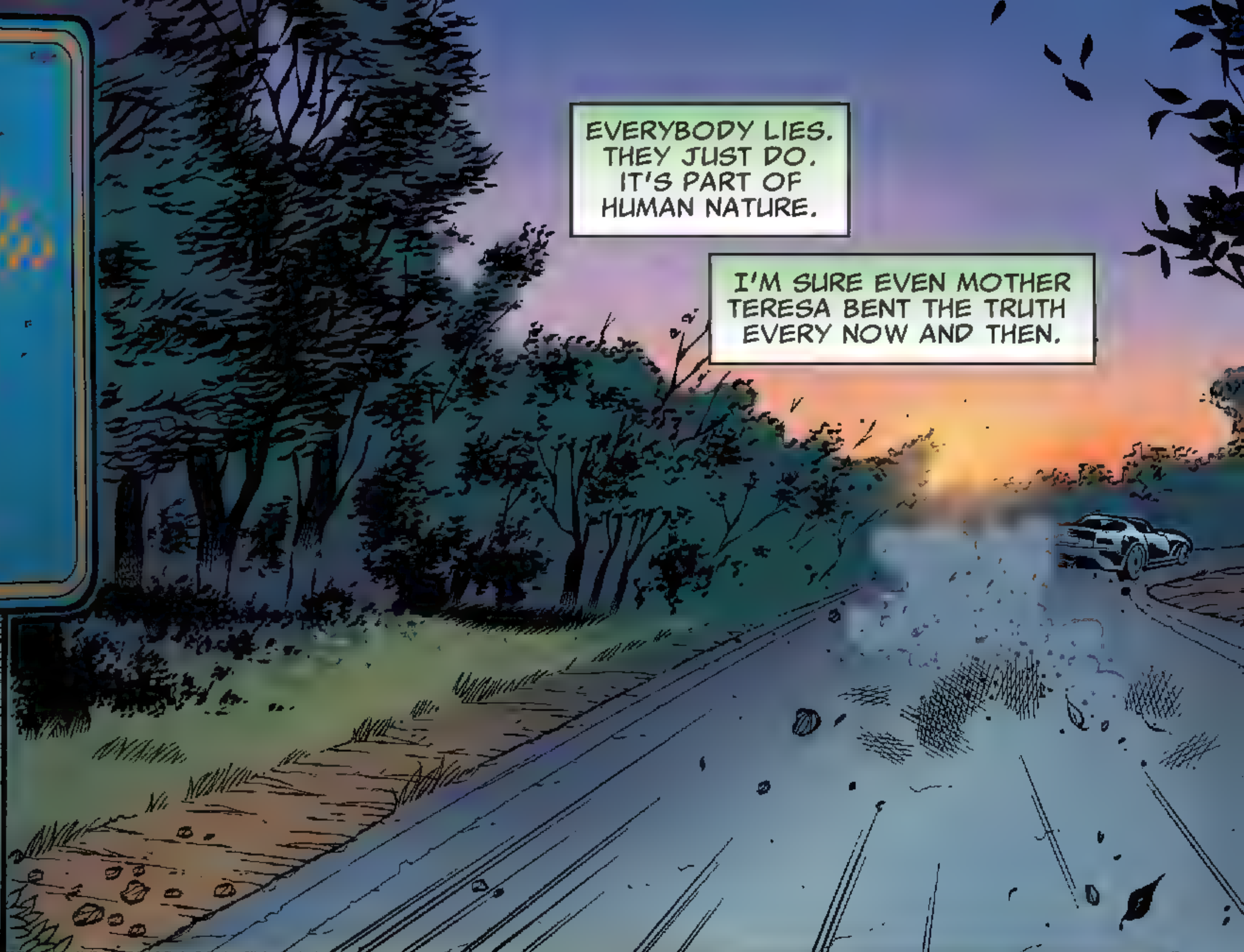
"BLESS MY
SOUL, IT'S A
MIRACLE."



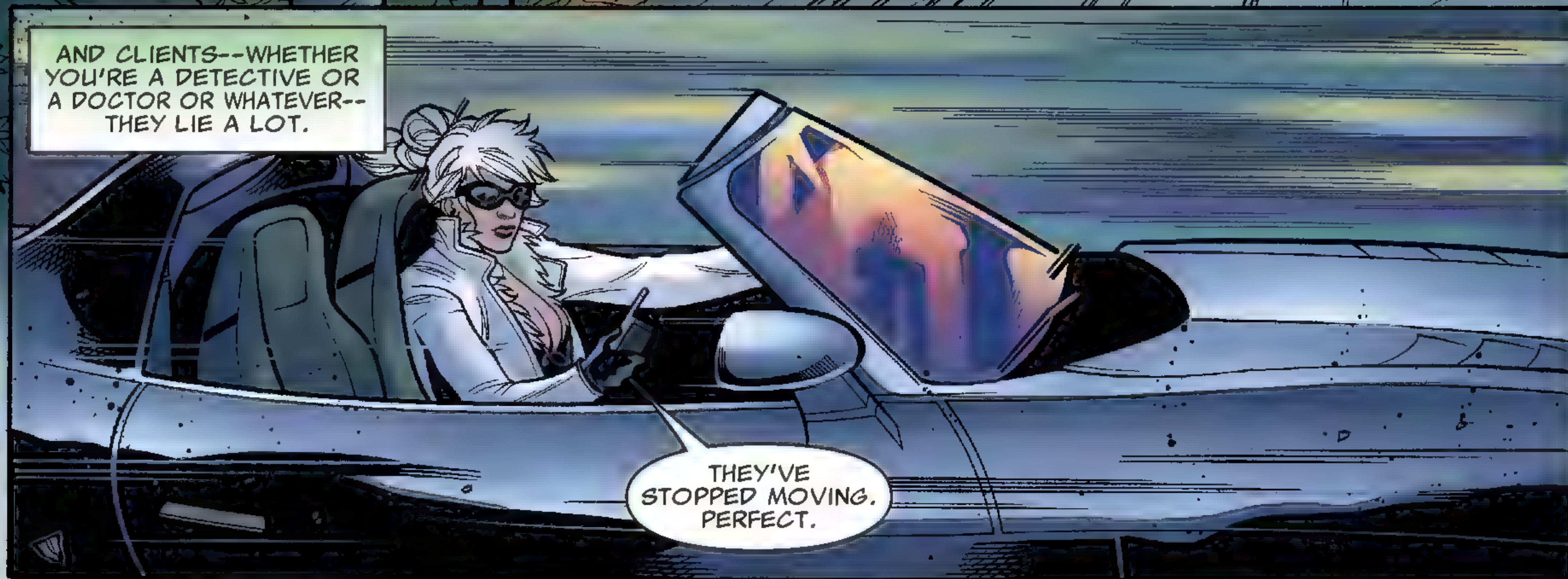


EVERYBODY LIES.
THEY JUST DO.
IT'S PART OF
HUMAN NATURE.

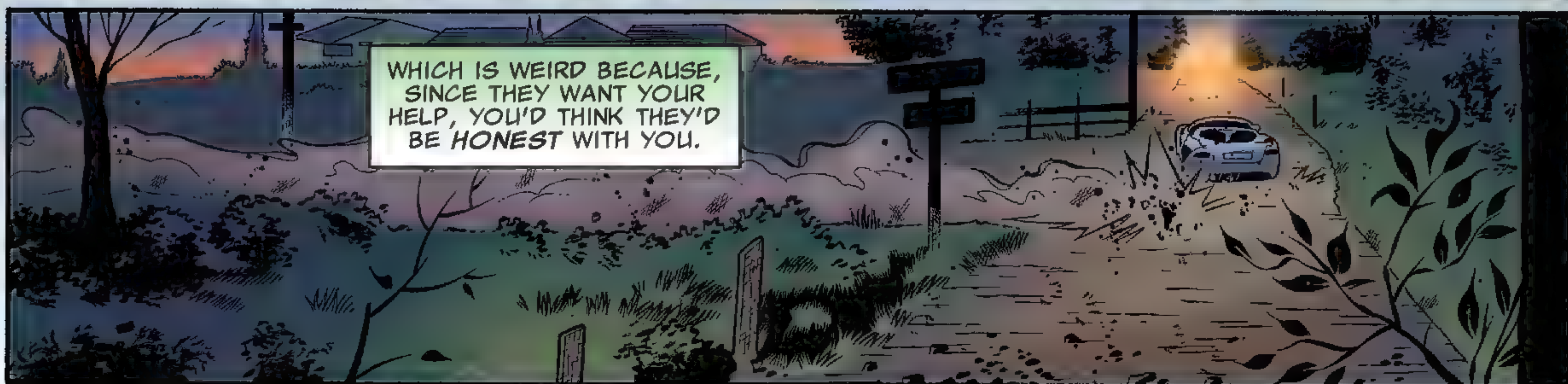
I'M SURE EVEN MOTHER
TERESA BENT THE TRUTH
EVERY NOW AND THEN.



AND CLIENTS--WHETHER
YOU'RE A DETECTIVE OR
A DOCTOR OR WHATEVER--
THEY LIE A LOT.

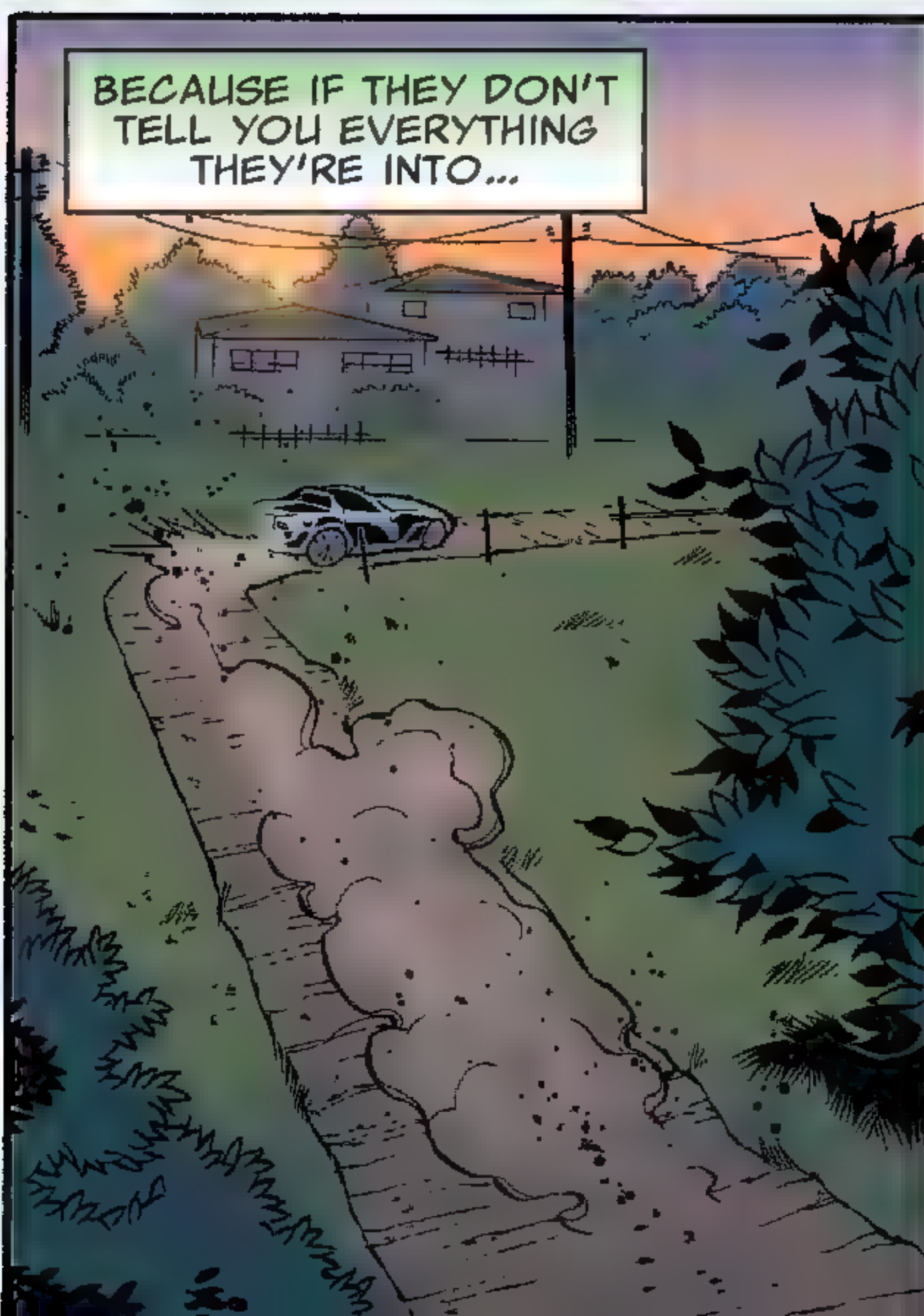


THEY'VE
STOPPED MOVING.
PERFECT.



WHICH IS WEIRD BECAUSE,
SINCE THEY WANT YOUR
HELP, YOU'D THINK THEY'D
BE HONEST WITH YOU.

BECAUSE IF THEY DON'T
TELL YOU EVERYTHING
THEY'RE INTO...



...THEN YOU CAN WIND UP
BEING BLINDSIDED AND
NEVER SEE IT COMING.



OW!
STUPID
MOSQUIT--!

--OOOH...

...CRAP...



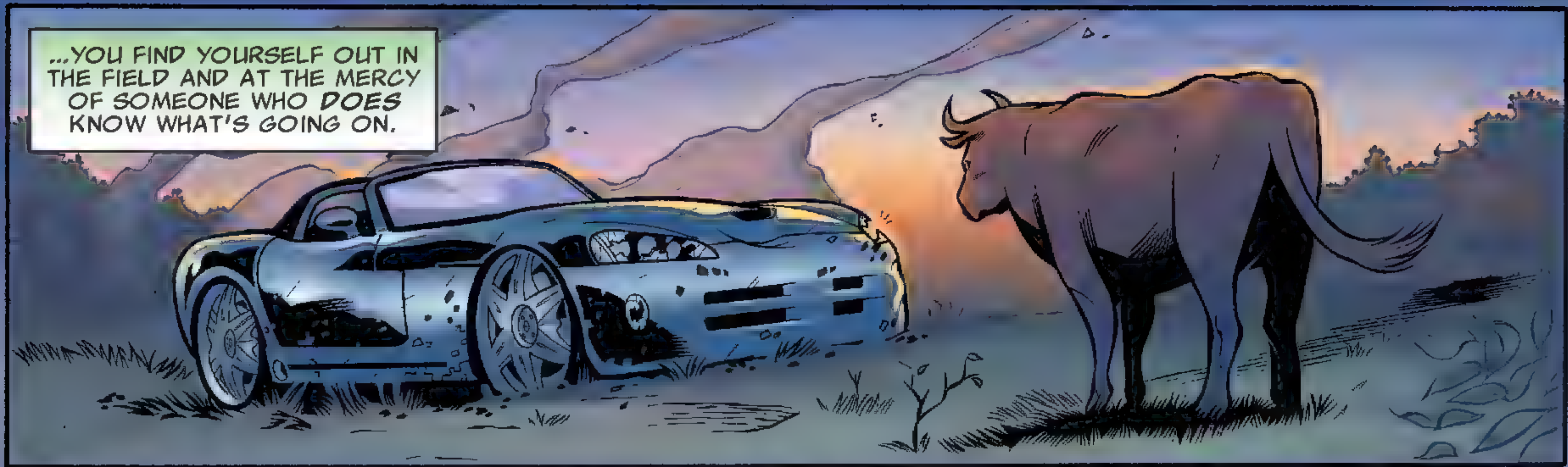


WHERE'S...
SPIDER-SENSE...
WHEN YOU...

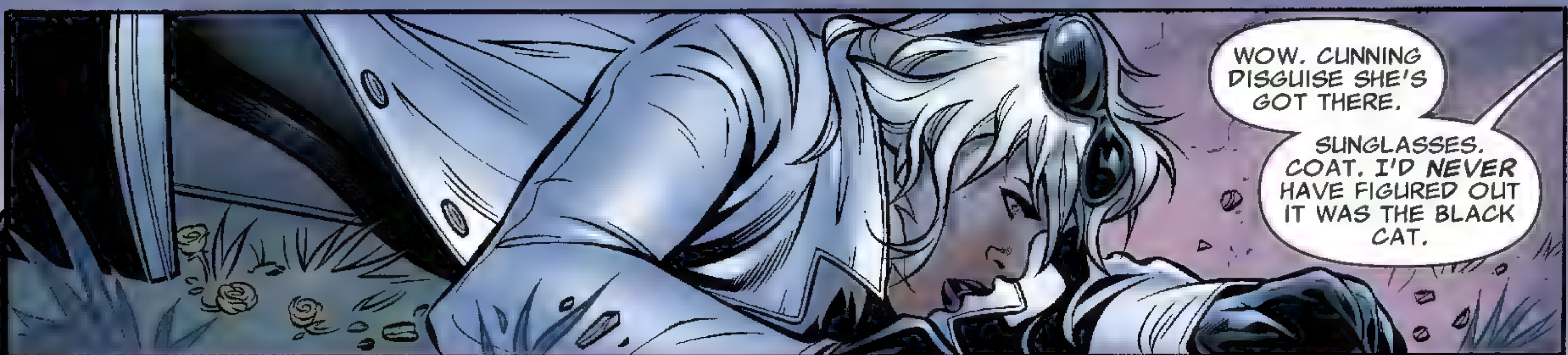
...NEED...



SO INSTEAD OF BEING
PREPARED FOR WHATEVER
YOU MIGHT ENCOUNTER...



...YOU FIND YOURSELF OUT IN
THE FIELD AND AT THE MERCY
OF SOMEONE WHO **DOES**
KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON.



WOW. CUNNING
DISGUISE SHE'S
GOT THERE.

SUNGLASSES.
COAT. I'D NEVER
HAVE FIGURED OUT
IT WAS THE BLACK
CAT.



NICE SHOT,
ROCKY.

THANKS, SYL.
NICE TO KNOW
I'VE STILL
GOT IT.

NOW
WHAT?

NOW...WE GO
HAVE A REUNION
WITH THE MAN WHO
MADE US WHAT
WE ARE TODAY.

AND WE
KILL HIM
FOR IT.





ARE YOU OUT
OF YOUR MIND?!
YOU WORK
FOR ME!

AND YOU'RE
THE MAYOR, AND
YOUR SALARY COMES
OUT OF MY TAX DOLLARS,
SO YOU WORK FOR ME.
WE'RE EVEN.

DID YOU
THINK I WAS
GOING TO
FORGET?

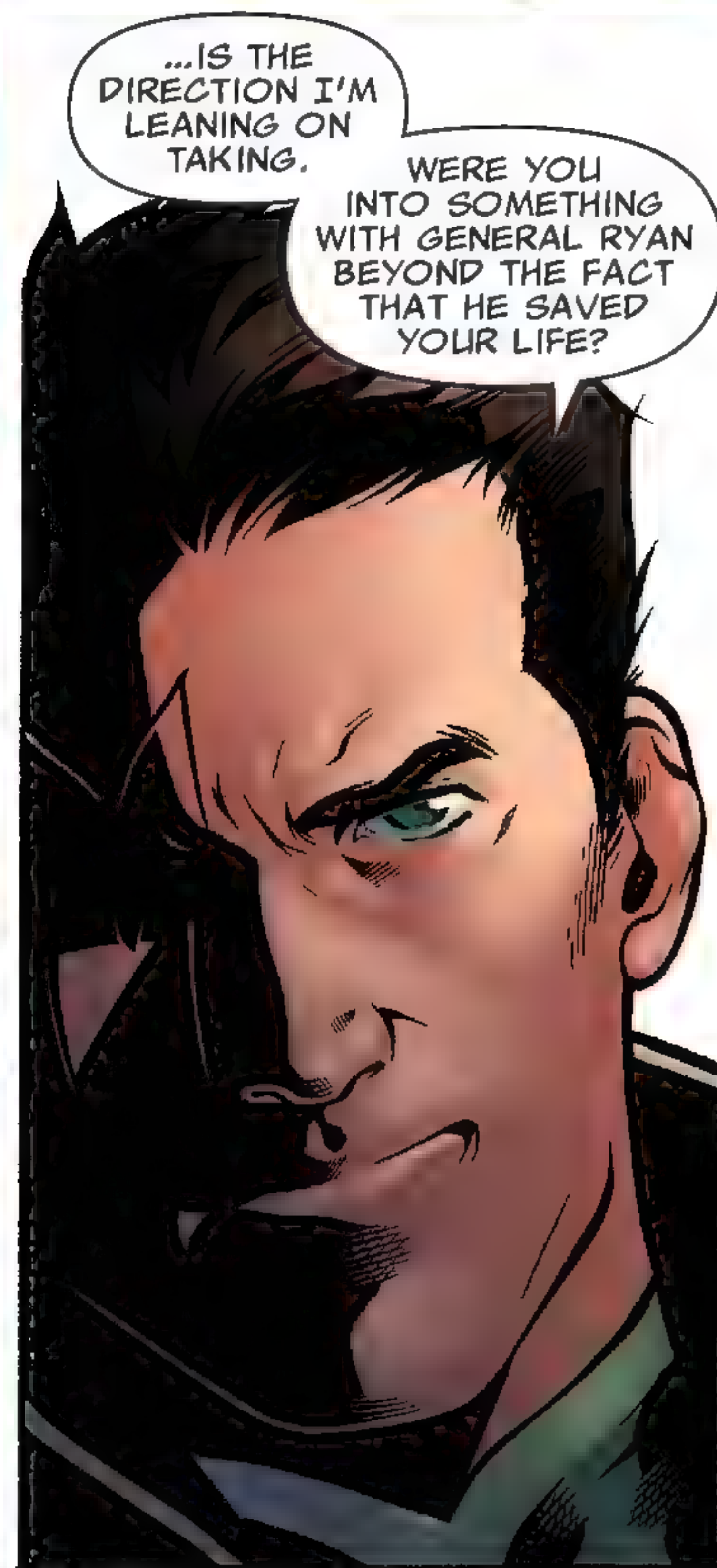
FORGET
WHAT? WHAT'RE
YOU--?

I WARNED YOU.
I SAID THERE WAS
SOMETHING GOING ON
THAT YOU WEREN'T
TELLING US.

THAT I'D
RIP IT OUT OF
YOUR MIND IF
I HAD TO.

WELL, NOW
WE'RE GOING TO
HAVE A MEETING
OF MINDS.

LIES, DAMNED LIES





I TOLD YOU EVERYTHING I FELT YOU NEEDED TO KNOW! SO ONE OF YOUR PEOPLE GOT HURT! YOU'RE IN A DANGEROUS LINE OF WORK AND--

I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THIS.

MONET...

CRACK HIS MIND OPEN AND SCOOP IT OUT LIKE A MELON.



WITH PLEASURE.

WAIT! THERE'S NO NEED FOR...

LOOK, I REALLY THOUGHT RYAN'S DEATH WAS AN ISOLATED CASE!

I HAD NO REASON TO THINK HIS PROGRAM WAS INVOLVED! THAT WAS DECADES AGO!



HOLD ON, M.

AWWW...

WHAT "PROGRAM"?



A BLACK OPS PROGRAM. HE CALLED IT SCARS: STRATEGIC CAPTURE AND RETRIEVAL.

A CYBERNETIC UPDATE OF THE SUPER-SOLDIER PROGRAM. A GUY NAMED YOUNG SOO POKK CAME UP WITH IT.

BUT RYAN COULDN'T GET THE FUNDING FOR IT, SO HE CAME TO ME. I OWED HIM MY LIFE, SO...



AND THE SHOOTER WAS PART OF IT?

POSSIBLY...

THEN SHE'S OLDER THAN SHE LOOKED. A HEALING FACTOR WOULD EXPLAIN WHY SHE GOT RIGHT UP--



WAIT. I MISSED SOMETHING.

WHO'S "YOUNG SOO POCK"?



HE WAS A KOREAN MEDIC. BRILLIANT SURGEON.

IN THOSE DAYS, THE THREE OF US WERE THICK AS--



HE WAS THE THIRD ONE IN THE PICTURE YOU SHOWED US.

THAT'S RIGHT.

WHERE IS HE NOW?

I DON'T KNOW! THIS WAS ALL YEARS AGO.



SAM NEVER TOLD ME HOW THE PROGRAM WORKED OUT, AND I NEVER ASKED.

THESE WOMEN...IF THEY'RE PART OF THIS SCARS THING...

THEY COULD BE TARGETING THIS POCK GUY.



LOOK, NONE OF THIS IS--

WHERE'S THE PICTURE?

DOWN IN MY OFFICE.

LET'S GET IT.

NOW SEE HERE--!



HE SAID, "GET IT." GET IT?

G-GOT IT...

GOOD.



THIS IS
GETTING ME
NOWHERE.



THE FBI HAS
NO FILE ON THIS
WOMAN?

AT LEAST
NOTHING THAT
MATCHES THE
PICTURE THAT I'VE
GOT TO WORK
WITH.



HEY!
VICTOR!

RICTOR.

LIKE I
CARE.

PICK UP
ON LINE 1. IT'S
MADROX.



HIS NAME, PIP
REMEMBERS.

YEAH, HEY,
MADROX. I'M
COMING UP EMPTY
ON THE SEARCH...



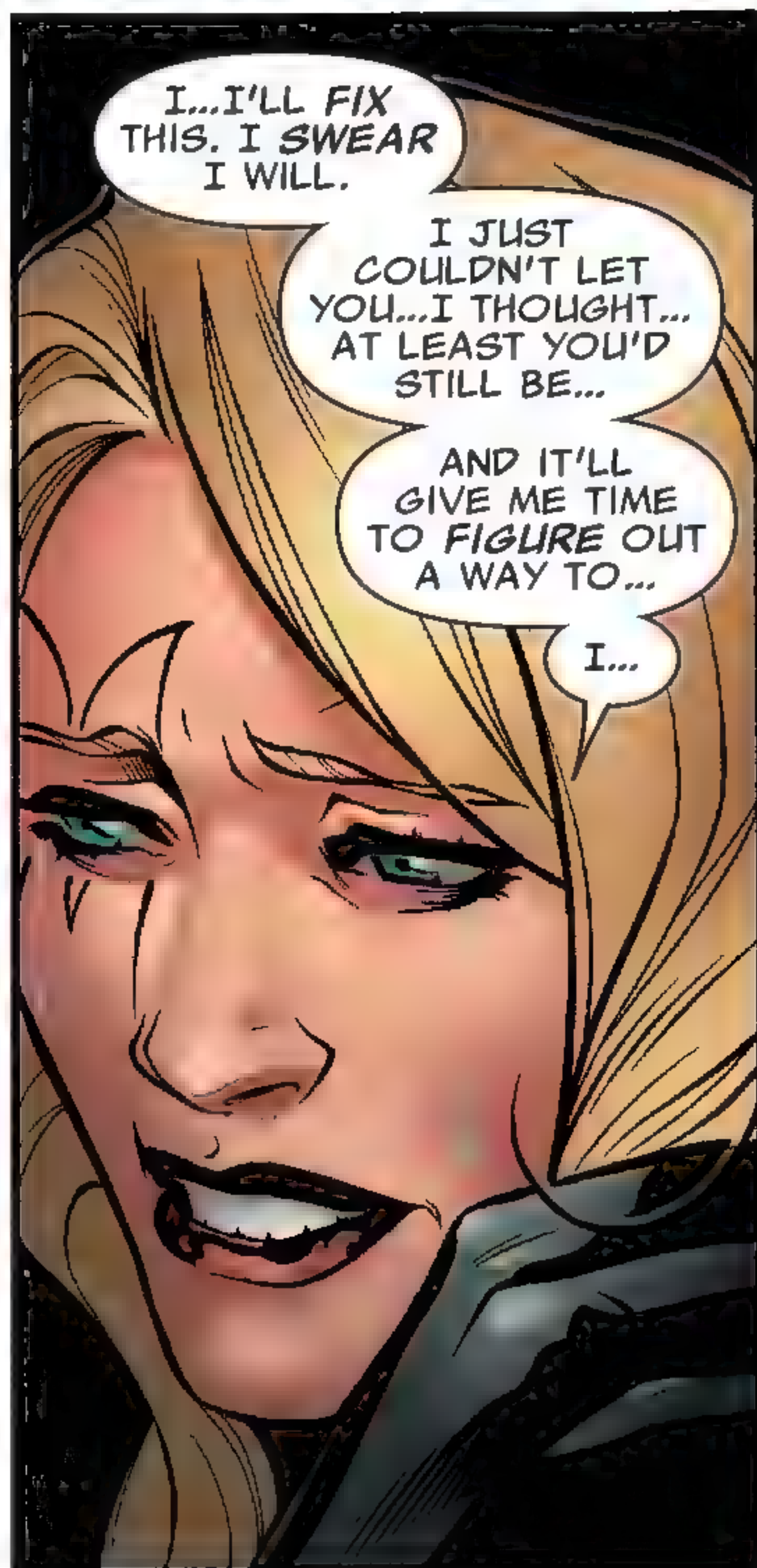
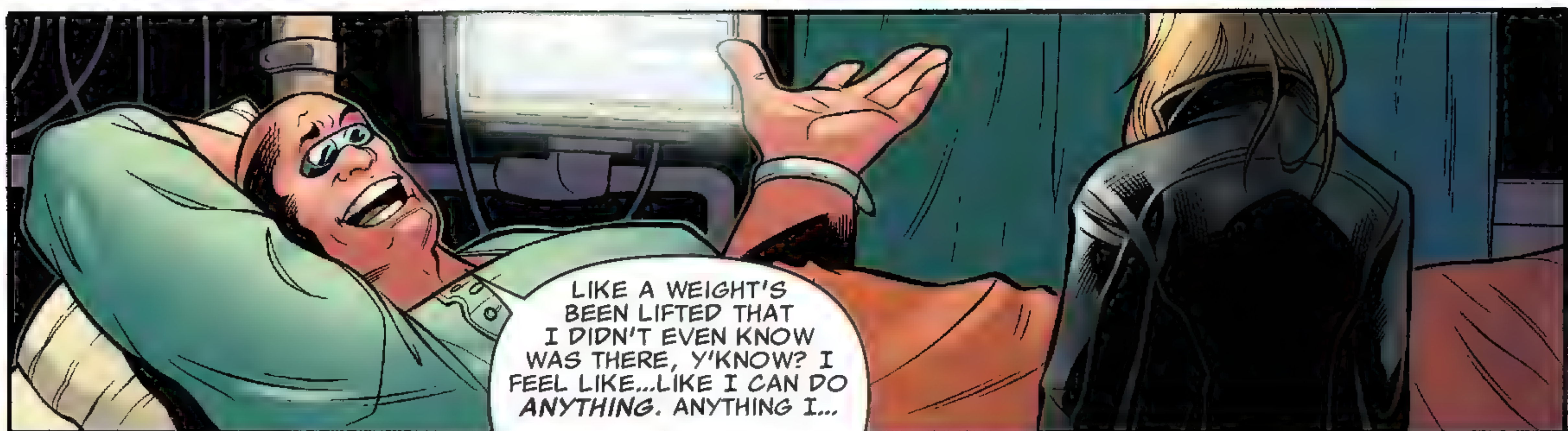
GOT A NEW
ONE FOR YOU. A
DOCTOR YOUNG
SOO POCK.

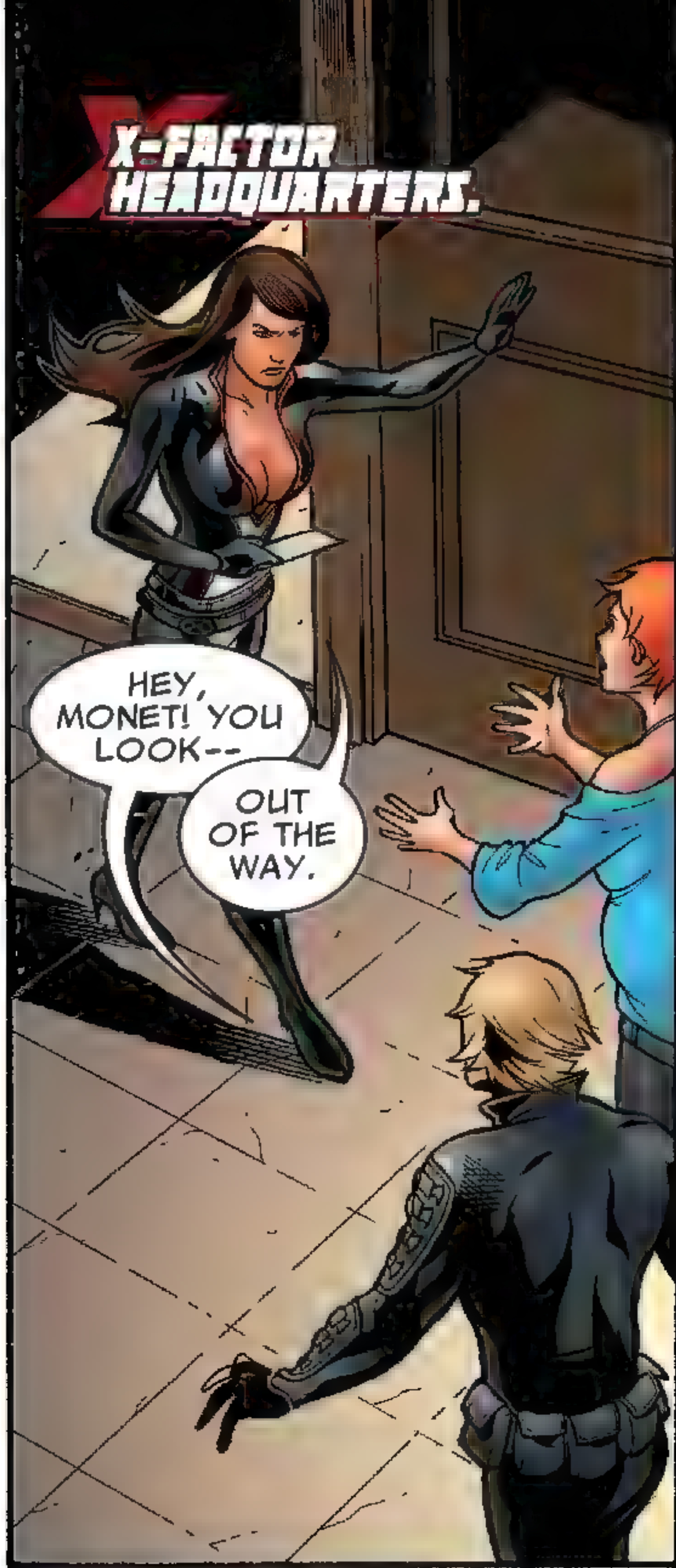
MONET'S ON
HER WAY WITH A
PICTURE OF HIM.
TERRY'S BUSY
KEEPING JAMESON
ENTERTAINED.

HOW DO
YOU MAKE YOUR
HAIR STAND UP
LIKE THAT?

GOT HIT
BY LIGHTNING
AS A KID.
TWICE.

THAT
EXPLAINS
A LOT.





X-FACTOR HEADQUARTERS.

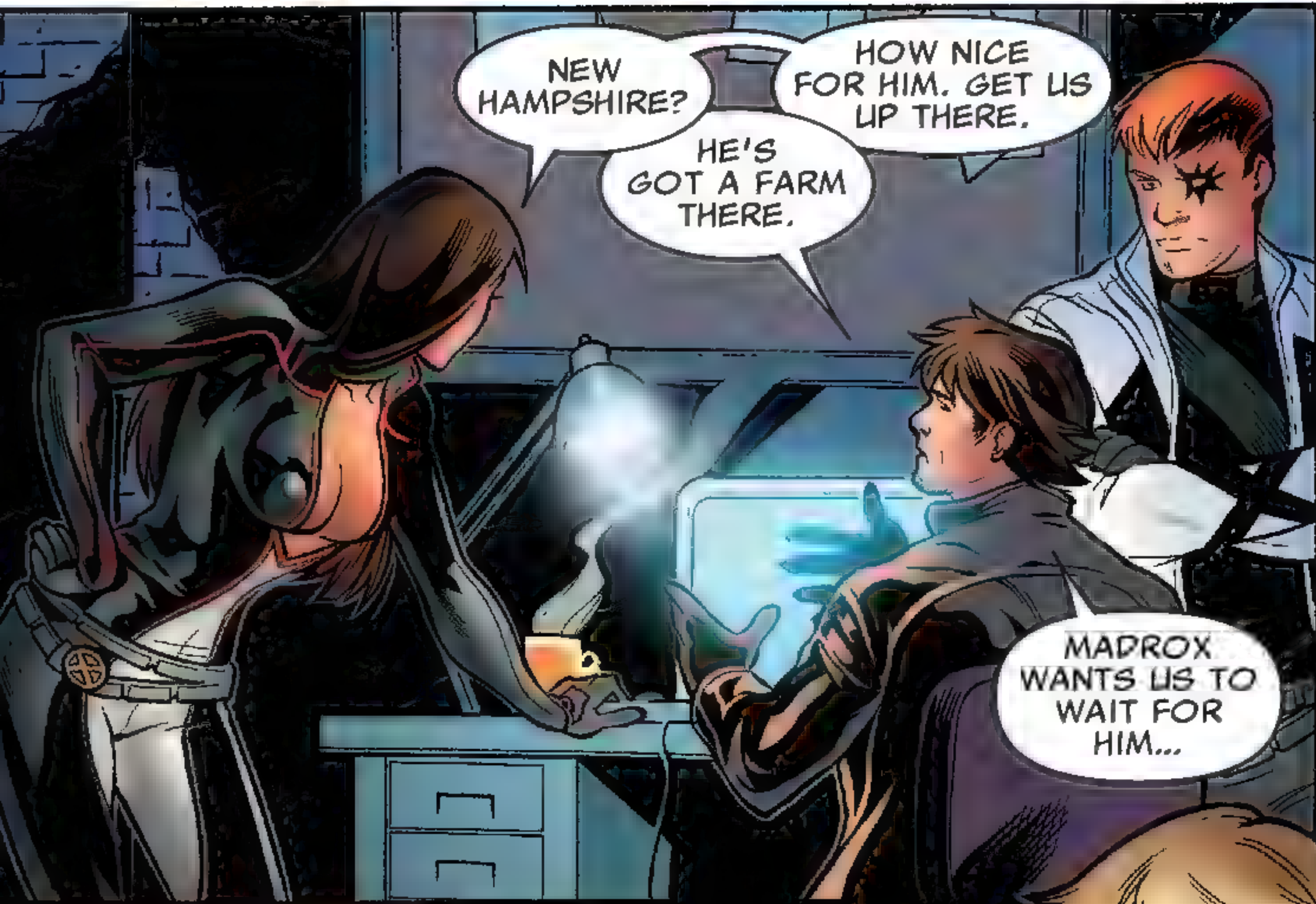
HEY, MONET! YOU LOOK--
OUT OF THE WAY.



SHE'S IN A MOOD.
I CANNA BLAME HER. GUIDO ALMOST DIED.



GOT THE PICTURE.
DON'T NEED IT. HE HAD AN FBI FILE, INCLUDING HOME ADDRESS.
I'M PULLING UP A SATELLITE SHOT OF IT RIGHT NOW.
ONCE WE SEE IT, I CAN BRING US STRAIGHT THERE.



NEW HAMPSHIRE?
HE'S GOT A FARM THERE.
HOW NICE FOR HIM. GET US UP THERE.

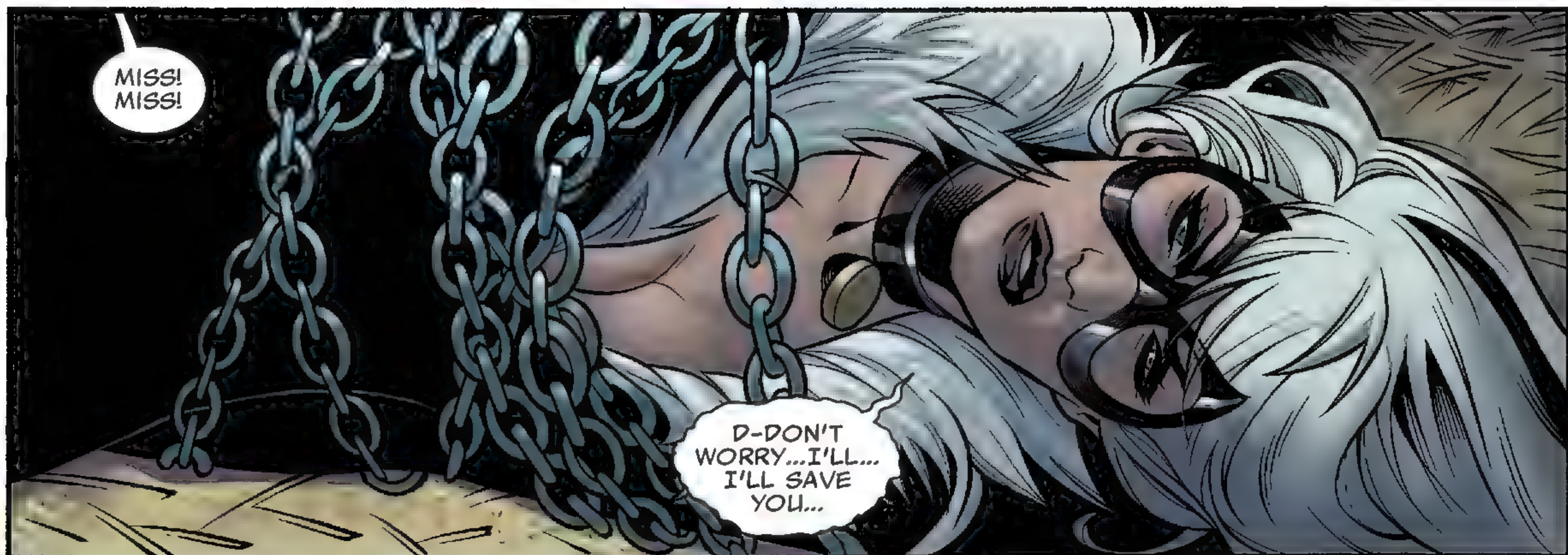
MADROX WANTS US TO WAIT FOR HIM...



I DON'T GIVE A DAMN WHAT MADROX WANTS. I WANT HER HEAD. NOW.
YOU IN, 'STAR?
ABSOLUTELY. LET'S GO NOW; MADROX MIGHT TRY TO STOP US FROM KILLING HER.



I'M IN ALSO.
ME TOO.
LIHM...WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?
GOING AFTER THE BITCH THAT HURT GUIDO.
OH. THEN DEFINITELY, YES.



MISS!
MISS!

D-DON'T
WORRY...I'LL...
I'LL SAVE
YOU...



YEAH, UHM...
GOOD LUCK
WITH THAT.

SO...DOC
POCK...AFTER
ALL THIS TIME,
HOW'S IT
HANGING?

PLEASE...
SYLVIOUS...ALL
OF YOU...LISTEN
TO ME...

LISTEN TO
YOU? ABOUT
WHAT?



ABOUT HOW ROCKY
AND NOELLE
WERE DEAD?

THAT'S
WHAT YOU
TOLD ME!

I WAS BEING
MERCIFUL TO
YOU! TO THEM!
YOU DON'T
UNDERSTAND!

THEN
EXPLAIN IT
TO ME!

THE
CHANGES WE MADE TO
YOU THREE...YOU, SYL, CAME
THROUGH IT MENTALLY UNSCATHED...
OR RELATIVELY SO, AT ANY RATE...



"...BUT THE OTHER TWO...
BALLISTIQUE, ROCOCO...
THEY BECAME INCREASINGLY
UNSTABLE.

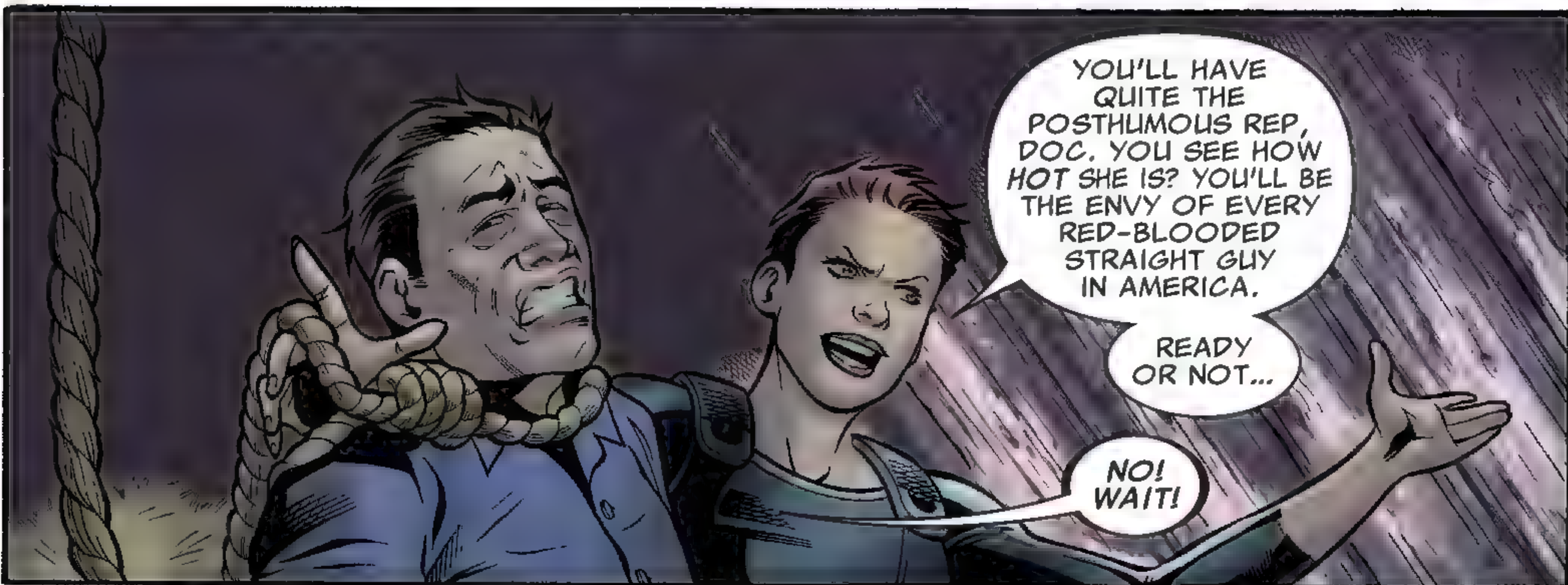
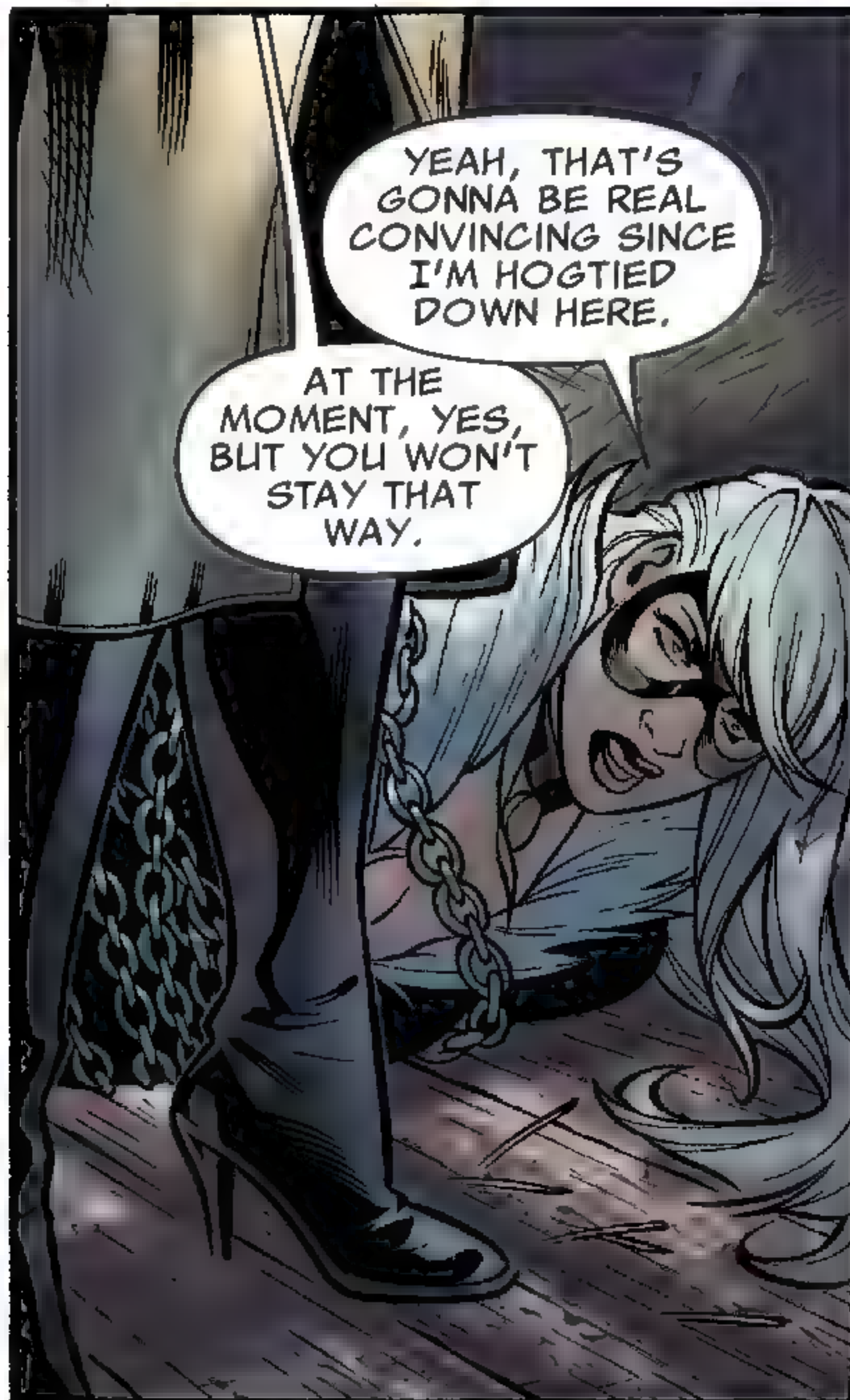
"YOU WERE DESIGNED TO BE A
SALVAGE AND RESCUE TEAM.
INSTEAD THEY TOOK OFF ON THEIR
OWN, GRABBING MERCENARY JOBS...

"...JUST TO GIVE THEM
THE OPPORTUNITY TO
KILL AND KEEP KILLING.

"WE HAD TO REIN THEM IN...SHUT
THEM DOWN. THE GENERAL, HE
JUST WANTED TO END THEM, AND
YOU TOO, JUST IN CASE...

"BUT I CONVINCED HIM I
COULD WIPE THEIR MEMORIES.
GIVE THEM NEW IDENTITIES, A
CHANCE AT NORMAL LIVES.

"THEY'D BE DEAD IF
IT WEREN'T FOR ME!"





YOU WANT TO BE ABLE
TO COUNT ON PEOPLE,
EVEN THOUGH THEY LIE.

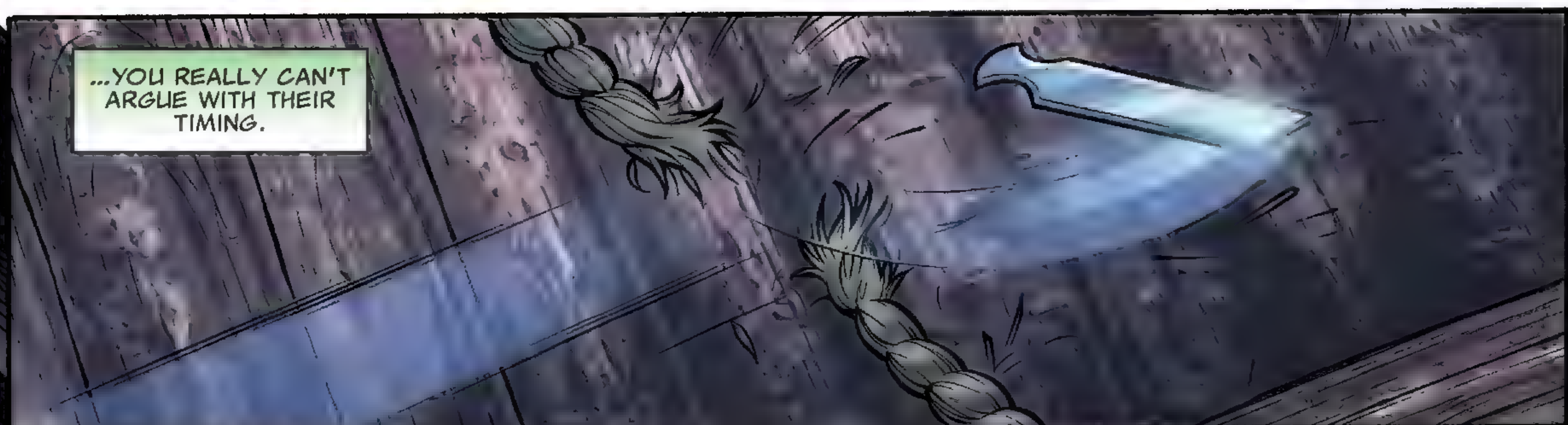
I THOUGHT I COULD
COUNT ON MY CREW
BEING BACK AT HQ
WHEN TERRY AND I
RETURNED.

INSTEAD THEY'RE
GONE.

ON THE ONE
HAND, I'M
FURIOUS.



ON THE OTHER
HAND...



...YOU REALLY CAN'T
ARGUE WITH THEIR
TIMING.



OOOOOOFFA



GO AHEAD!
TAKE A SWING
AT US!

I'M
BEGGING
YOU!



THIS IS
NONE OF YOUR
BUSINESS!

HE'S GOT IT
COMING!



WE ALL
GOT IT COMING,
KID.

Turns out that Rictor
started showing him
Westerns. He watched
"Unforgiven" nine times.

Least he's
got good
taste.



RICTOR!
GET POCK OUT
OF HERE!

THANKS,
MONET! LEMME
AT 'EM!



GET
OUT OF THE--
OOOF!

IDIOTS.



WILL YOU
PEOPLE GET IT
TOGETHER? IT'S
EMBARRA--



BLAM



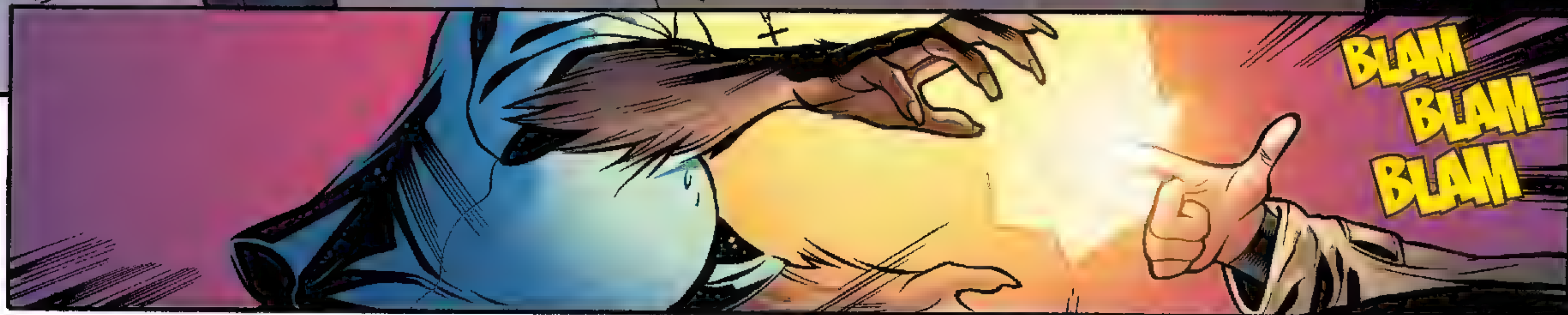
HAVEN'T YOU
GOTTEN THE
MESSAGE YET,
ST. CROIX?

MY LITTLE
CYBER-BULLETS
CAN KILL
ANYTHING!

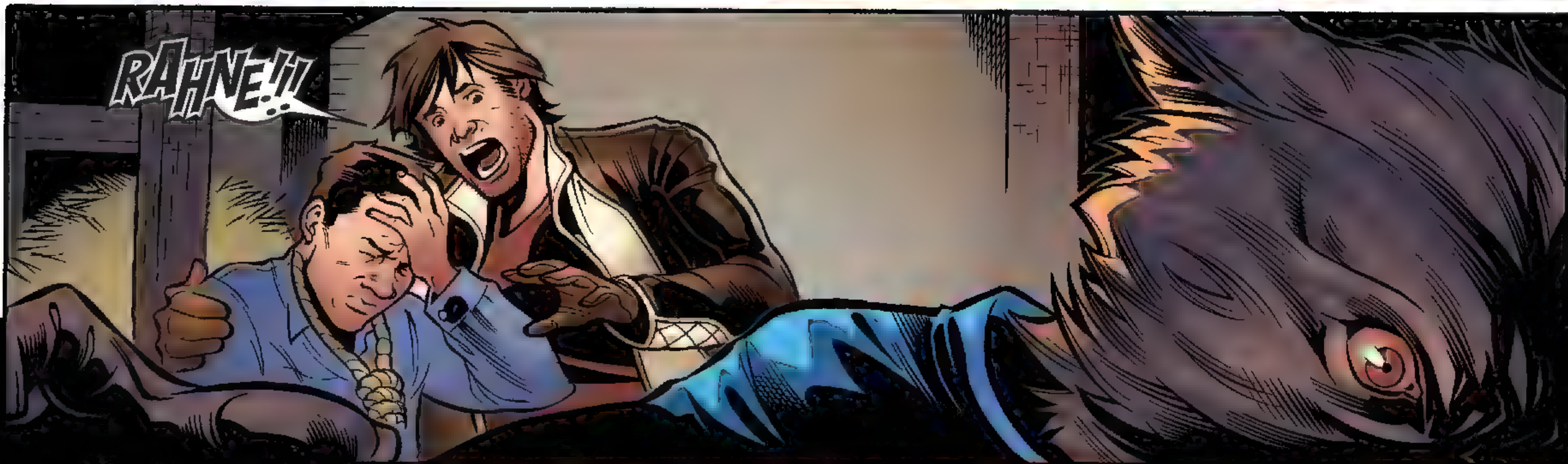


AYE? GOD'S TRUTH?

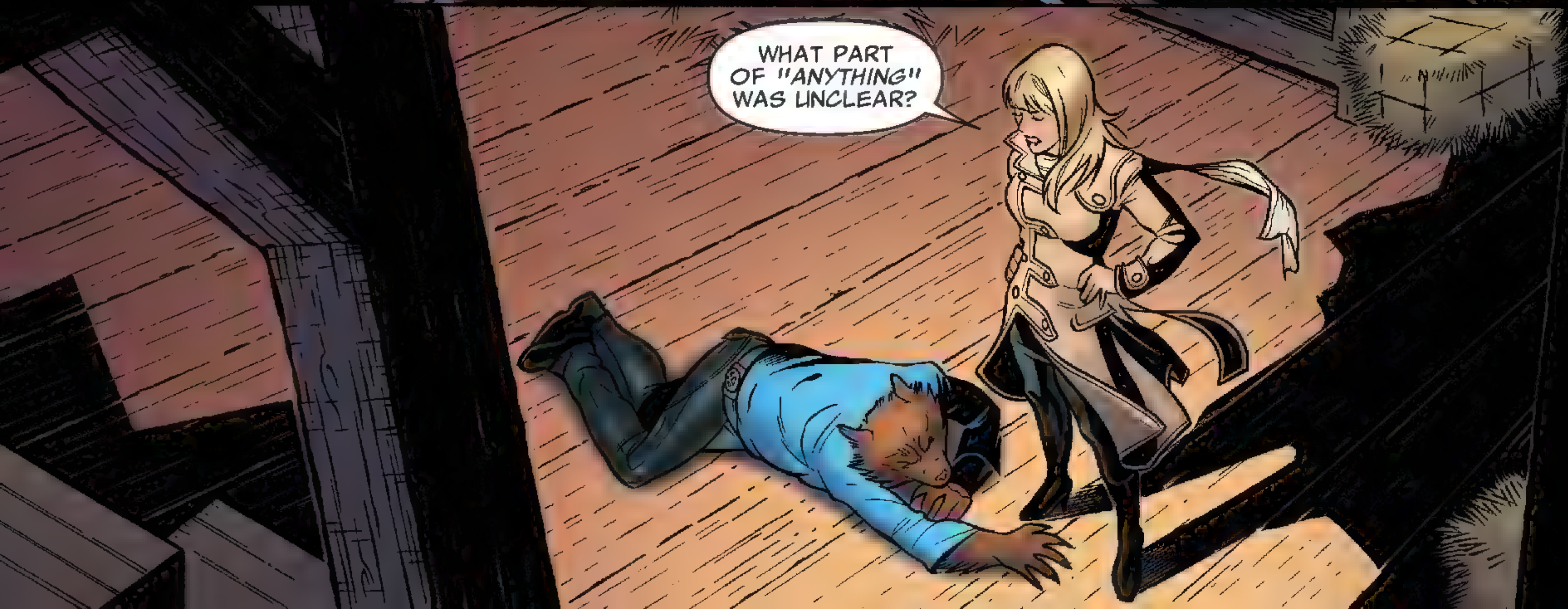
LET'S TEST THAT, SHALL WE?



BLAM
BLAM
BLAM

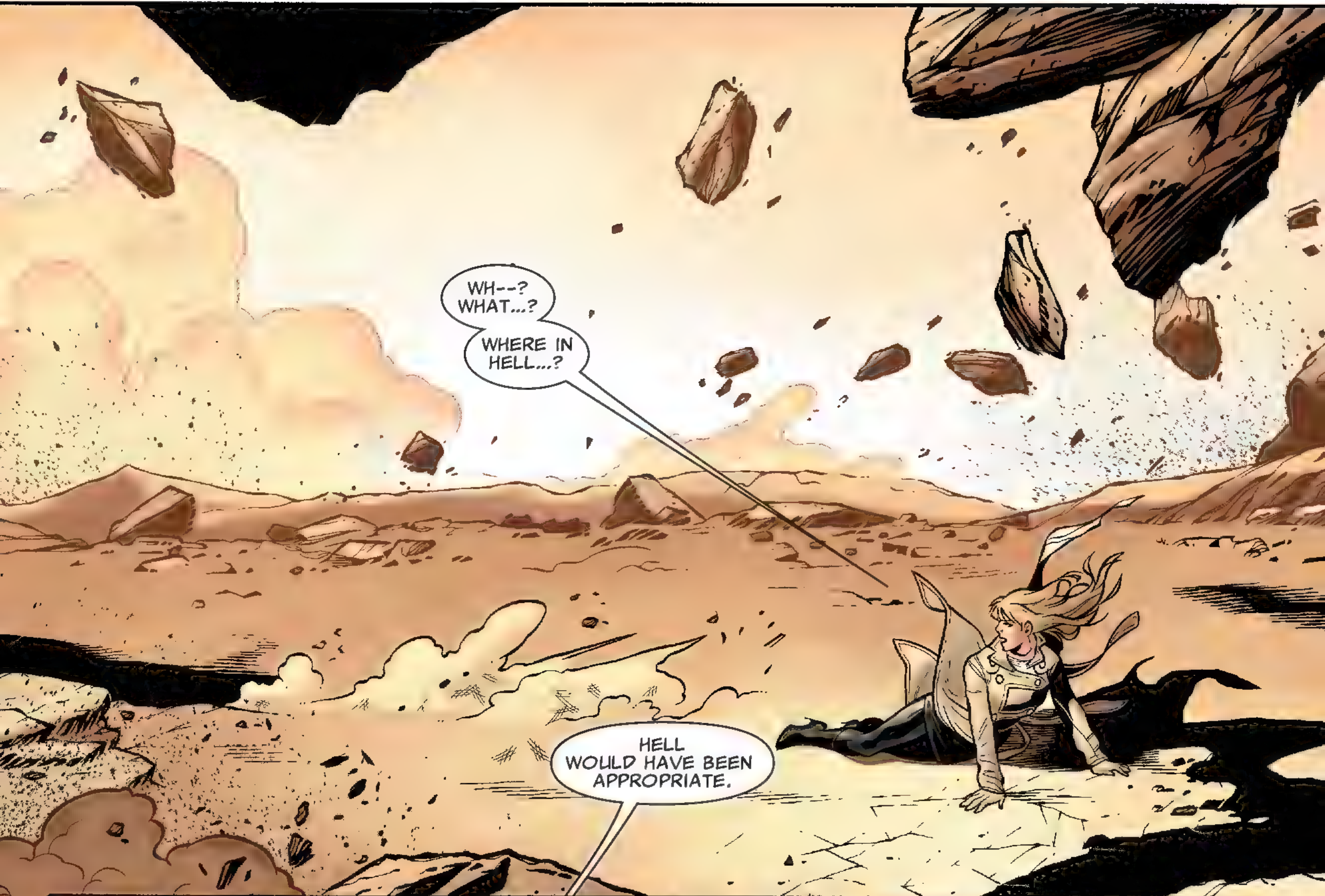


RAHNE!!!



WHAT PART OF "ANYTHING" WAS UNCLEAR?





WH--?
WHAT...?
WHERE IN
HELL...?

HELL
WOULD HAVE BEEN
APPROPRIATE.



BUT THIS
WILL DO.

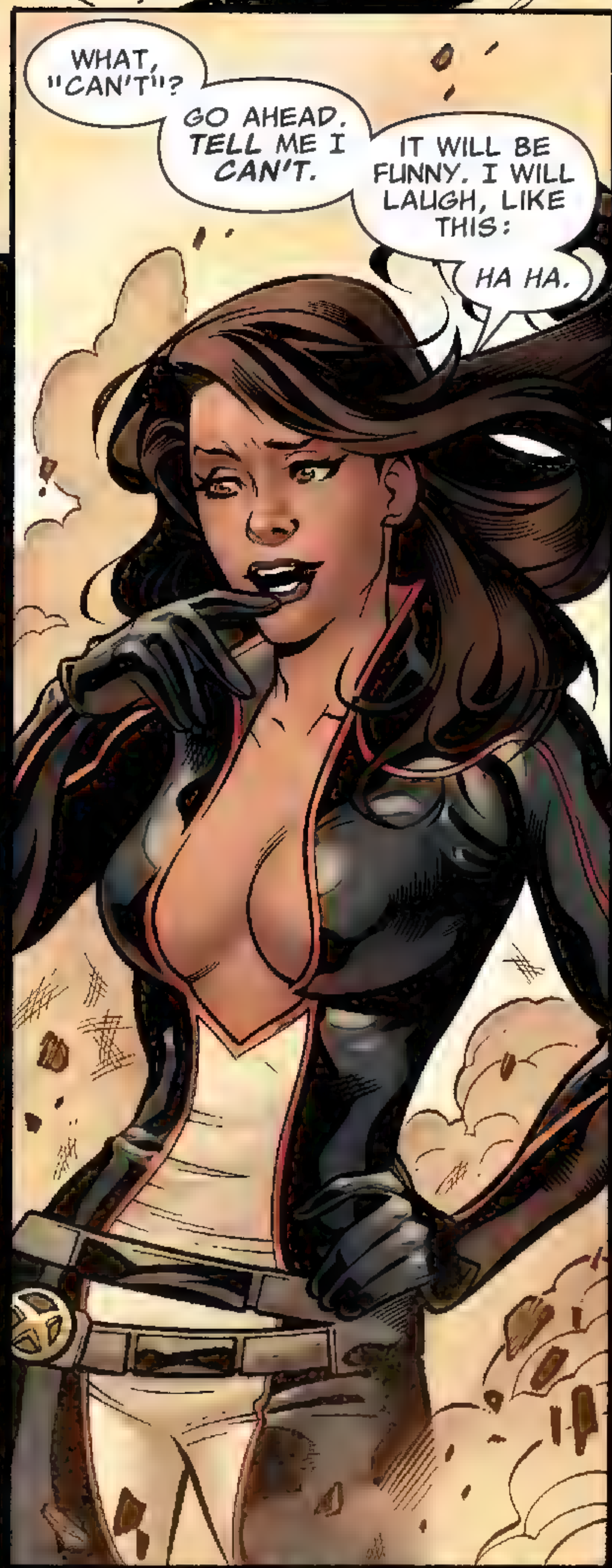
I SAID I
WANTED YOUR
HEAD, AND NOW
I HAVE IT. THE
INSIDE.

I COULD
NEVER DO THIS
IF YOU HADN'T
WILLINGLY LET ME
IN THE FIRST TIME.
BUT SINCE I'VE
ALREADY WALKED
YOUR NEURAL
PATHWAYS, I
COULD FIND
MY WAY
BACK IN.



YOUR BODY
WILL RECOVER FROM
PHYSICAL DAMAGE, BUT
NOT ALL THE HEALING
FACTOR IN THE WORLD
WILL SAVE YOU
FROM THIS.

WAIT!
STOP! YOU...
YOU--

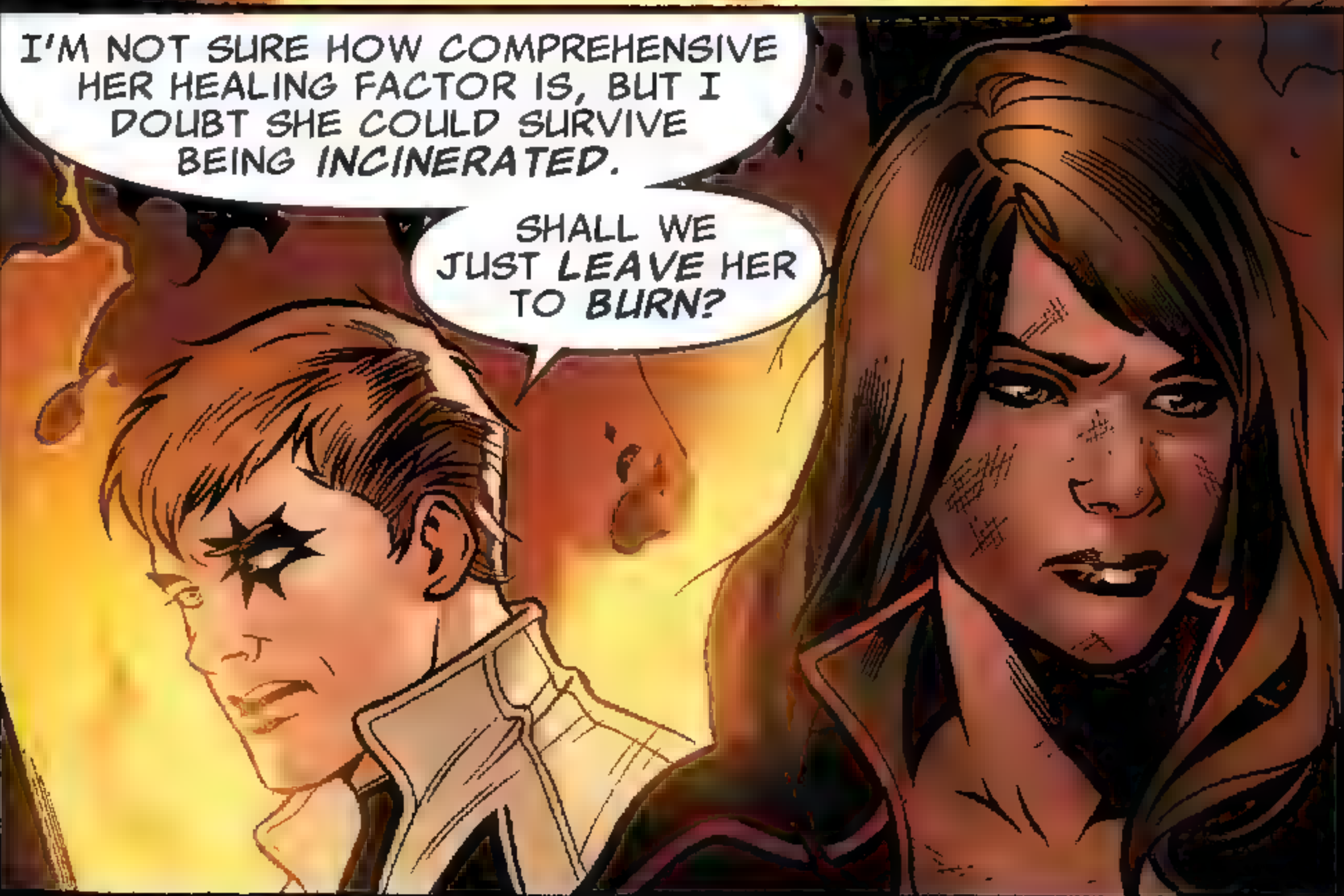


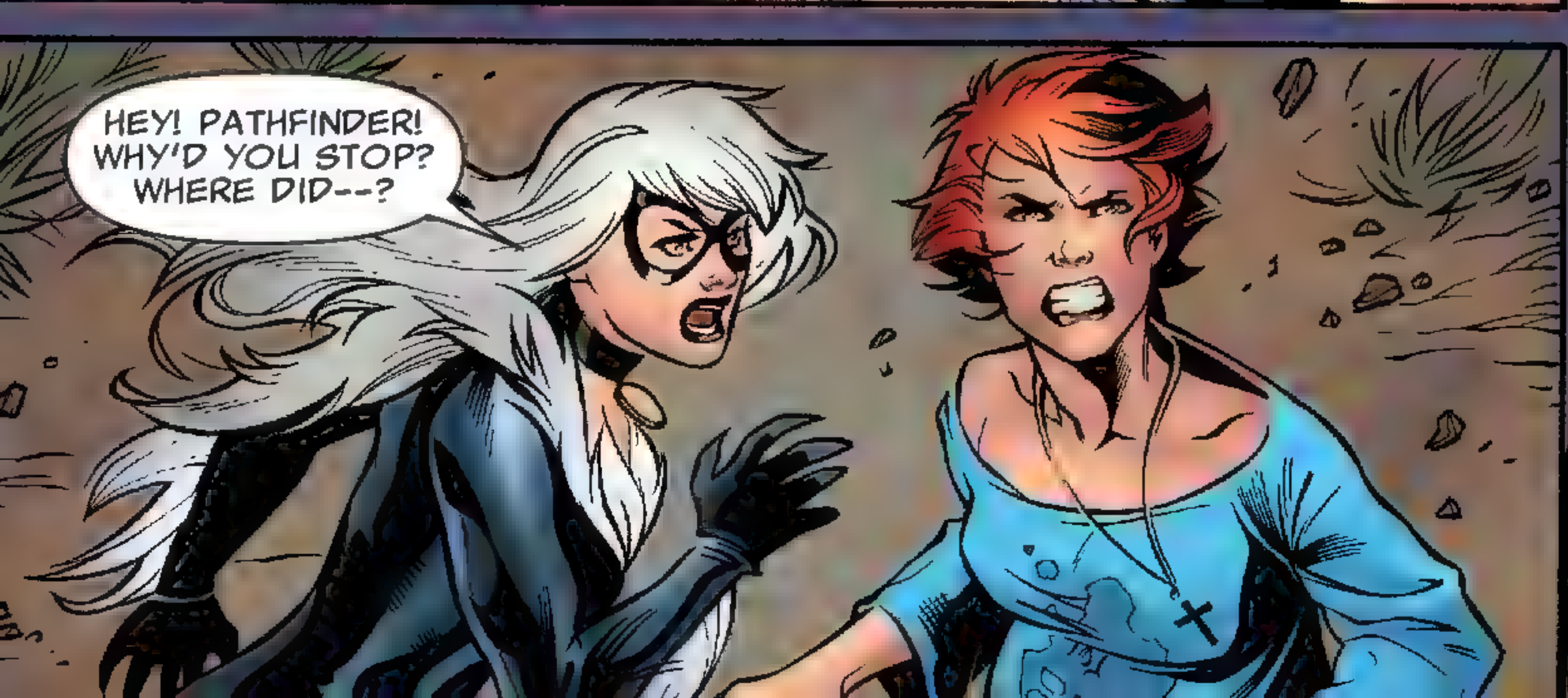
WHAT,
"CAN'T"?

GO AHEAD.
TELL ME I
CAN'T.

IT WILL BE
FUNNY. I WILL
LAUGH, LIKE
THIS:

HA HA.







MONET!
WE
WERE GETTING
WORRIED!



IS SHE
DEAD?

NO.
DID
YOU GET THE
OTHERS?



THEY HAD A
HELICOPTER.

BUT YOU
COULD FLY
AFTER THEM,
MONET!



YES! YES!
STOP THEM FOR
GOOD SO THEY
WON'T--

WON'T WHAT?
KILL YOU FOR
MESSING WITH THEIR
MINDS? DESTROYING
THEIR LIVES?



I...



WE WERE HIRED TO
CATCH RYAN'S KILLER.
WE DID THAT.
JOB'S OVER.

BESIDES...
THEY'RE PROBABLY
TOO FAR AWAY. I
COULD NEVER
CATCH THEM.



LIKE I SAID...
EVERYBODY
LIES.

TO OUR FRIENDS...
TO OUR ENEMIES...

...AND TO
OURSELVES.

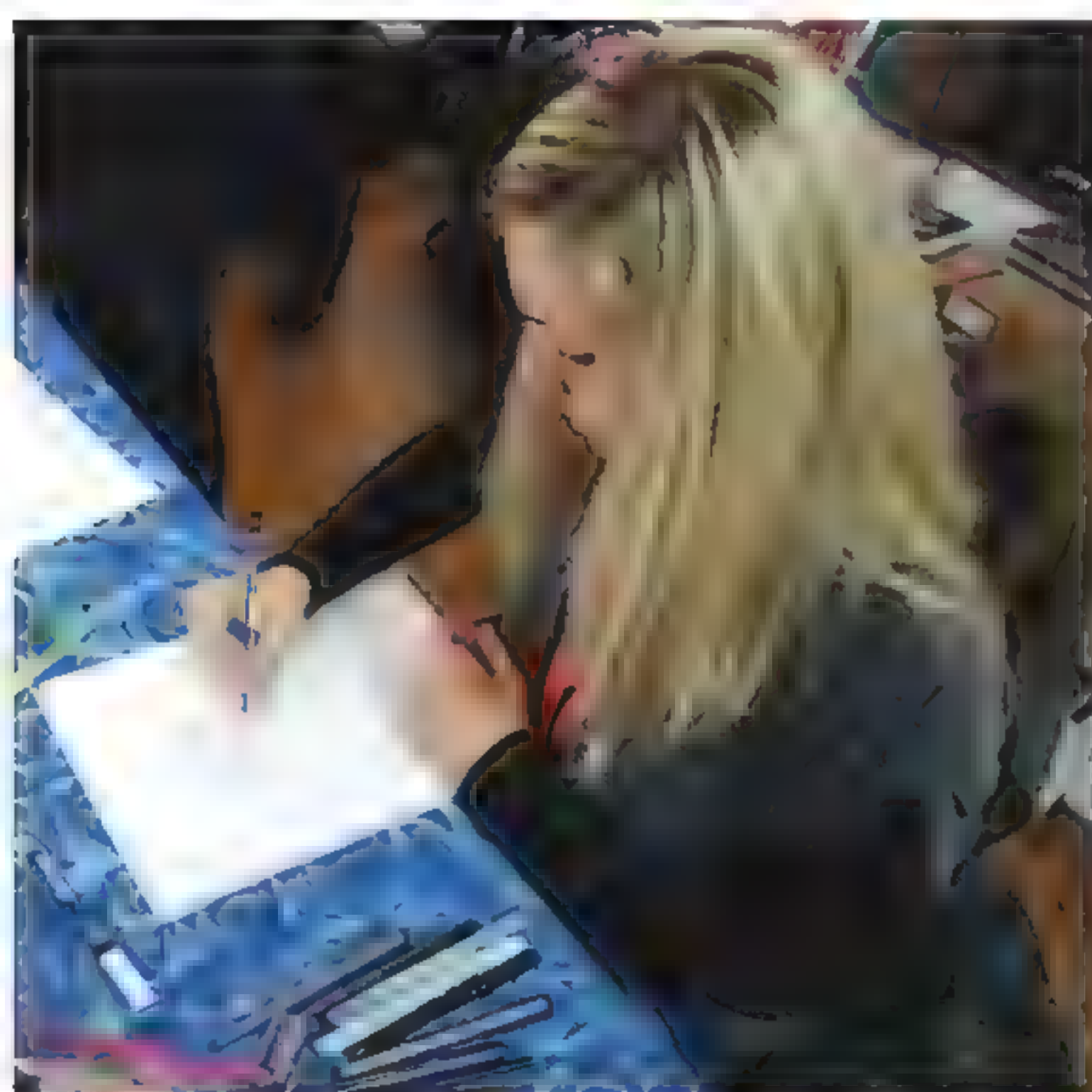
X



OPENING THE SKETCHBOOK: X-FACTOR'S EMANUELA LUPACCHINO

BY JOHN RHETT THOMAS

ART FROM X-FACTOR #208, PAGE 8.



THIS JUST IN: Peter David isn't the only lovely and talented creator behind *X-Factor*! Artist Emanuela Lupacchino, a new artistic force at Marvel, recently took over as penciler on the most left-of-center X-book in the Marvel family. Lupacchino is part of a wave of Italian artists making an impression at the House of Ideas, joining the likes of Simone Bianchi, Stefano Caselli, Giuseppe Camuncoli, Marco Checchetto in bringing their artistry across the ocean to America. And with her recent gig defining the world of Jamie Madrox and his team of mutant private eyes, she's busted up the boy's club that has been at Peter David's side ever since he relaunched *X-Factor* back in January 2006. So guys like Ryan Sook, Dennis Calero, Khoi Pham, Scot Eaton and Valentine De Landro? Move over for this petite Italian blonde with a powerful pencil. She's got some art to show you!





PENCILS TO X-FACTOR #211, PAGES 8 AND 9.

1 For the 27-year-old from Rome, Italy, this isn't her first profession. After getting credentialed and working in the field of biotechnology, she set aside her white lab coat and test tubes for a drawing table, pencils and brushes. "Although my passion for drawing has been there since I was very young, my formal academic education is not directly linked to the arts. I worked at a research laboratory until two years ago," Lupacchino said. "During that time, I attended a school for comic-book artists, where I learned how to draw comics in a professional way. When I got my first job as a comic-book artist here in Italy, I quit the previous one definitively." The scientific community's loss is the comic world's gain!

2 Lupacchino's success in comics came initially in Italy. "I worked on several books here in my home country. I started working on *L'Insonne*, a noir comic book, then I moved onto *Aurea Editorial*, where I worked on short stories for a magazine. I also worked as an illustrator and character designer for role-game books." Next up: the United States, where her pre-Marvel credits include IDW's *Star Trek* and *Angel: After the Fall*.

3 Of the tidal wave of talented artists cresting in the American comics market, Lupacchino said, "I'm definitely happy to see that the Italian talents are appreciated in the States and in the rest of Europe, as well. I've a good friendship with many of them, and I see them working with passion and enthusiasm. And that combination definitely delivers beautiful work as a result. I can say that my favorite artists here in Italy are Gabriele Dell'Otto — I really love his painting works — Marco Checchetto, Franco Urru and Fabio Mantovani."

4 An obvious line of questioning for Emanuela — probably not the first time she'll be asked, nor the last — regards that other demographic of artists she represents: the rapidly growing field of female pencilers. How does she feel about being part of a "girl power" movement in a world largely created for and dominated by boys? "Well, I think there's not a particular feeling about being a female comic-book artist, although I understand this is a male-dominated world. The most important thing is to do a good job and give everything you have to the work. Of course, sometimes during conventions I miss someone to talk with about girl stuff. But all the guys of that 'boys club' are really kind to me, and we spend the whole time talking about comic books. So in a world where people fly, mutants fight, and aliens and all kind of strange creatures are the protagonists, it's not too strange to be a woman!"

5 Well said, Ms. Lupacchino! It's all about the art in the end, anyway. Fortunately for everyone, her *X-Factor* work showcases some pretty good chops for someone barely out of the medical field. And in *X-Factor*, she's meeting many of characters she's drawing for the first time. "The most interesting thing I found working on *X-Factor* is that a lot of different characters come out to interact with Jamie Madrox's team. So far, I've met a diverse amount of characters such as Thor and Hela, Spider-Man and Black Cat, J. Jonah Jameson and Pip the Troll. It's a great chance for me because you can see them out of their main series, interacting in a different kind of story and background. I put a lot of study into their natures and their attitudes, and I tried to mix them up with the *X-Factor* crew the best way I could."

6 And collaborating with the regular *X-Factor* team? "It's simply amazing. Working over Peter David's scripts is really exciting because each story is full of fun and really pulls you in to the end of the story. That's very important for me because there are no boring moments while working, and each page is a pleasure to work on."

**PENCILS TO
X-FACTOR
#214, PAGES
2 AND 3.**





7 "Also the team of editors is wonderful. They make the job really exciting for me. Here in Italy there is not that kind of work structure with direct contact with the editors. The other artists I work with are doing a brilliant job over my artwork, and we're improving our chemistry issue by issue."



PENCILS FROM
X-FACTOR #216
(SPIDER-MAN),
#211 (THOR), AND
#218 (BLACK CAT).

X-FACTOR HAS RETURNED FROM LAS VEGAS AND IS READY FOR BUSINESS AS USUAL.

And for the world's premier mutant detective agency, business as usual is anything but usual! A trio of lovely but lethal lasses has its sights on arguably the biggest target in New York City, with inarguably its biggest mouth: Mayor J. Jonah Jameson! To solve this caper, X-Factor will need every bit of luck it can get — so whose side is the Black Cat on? Meanwhile, Darwin hits the road for parts unknown and runs afoul of a mystical gunslinger, a case involving a vampire gets X-Factor a little bloody, and did Jamie really ask Layla to marry him? Plus: new developments in the love triangle/baby-daddy drama between Rictor, Shatterstar and sweet little Rahne Sinclair. If the secrets Shatterstar learned in Vegas come out, then who knows how Rahne will react!



Collecting *X-Factor* #213-219 — written by **Peter David** (*Incredible Hulk*), and illustrated by **Valentine De Landro** (*Spider-Man Loves Mary Jane*) and **Emanuela Lupacchino** (*Angel: After the Fall*).

MARVEL

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